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TANTRIC VISUAL CULTURE

A Cognitive Approach

Sthaneshwar Timalsina

Special Nepal Edition

ROUTLEDGE

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श्री देवीप्रसाद ड्यूलाई सादर समर्पण.

स्थानेश्वर

March 24, 2016
San Diego, USA

'In this bold and brilliant book, Timalsina brings his formidable scholarship on Tantra to bear on questions regarding the nature and constitution of complex images, the purposes and techniques of visualization, the emotional dimension of abstract liturgical and cognitive processes, and the teleology of bodily discipline. The re-conceptualisation of Tantra in order to open up its potential to comparative philosophical understanding is provocative and thought-provoking; even more striking is the wide-ranging, astonishingly well-grounded and thoroughly original use of the ideas of cognitive linguistics in that endeavour. Not only scholars of Tantra and Hindu Studies more widely, but anyone interested in tackling fundamental philosophical questions about cognition, emotion and body should read this book; there is much benefit to be had from it.'

Dr. Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi,
University of Lancaster, UK

'Tantra, often misunderstood, finds illumination in this important book. Dr. Timalsina carefully explains the role of metaphor and metonymy as well as image and experience in this deeply affective exploration of the texts and practices of Tantra. Beautifully illustrated, this book gives access to material that has hitherto been unknown, including new perspectives on visualization through Yantra and Mandala as well as the efficacy and function of Mantra.'

Professor Christopher Key Chapple,
Loyola Marymount University, USA.

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Tantric Visual Culture

Indian culture relies greatly on visual expression, and this book uses both classical Indian and contemporary Western philosophies and current studies on cognitive sciences, and applies them to contextualize Tantric visual culture.

The work selects aspects of Tantric language and the practice of visualization, with the central premise to engage cognitive theories while studying images. It utilizes the contemporary theories of metaphor and cognitive blend, the theory of metonymy, and a holographic theory of epistemology with a focus on concept formation and its application to the study of myths and images. In addition, it applies the classical esthetic theory of *rasa* to unravel the meaning of opaque images. This philosophical and cognitive analysis allows materials from Indian culture to be understood in a new light, while engaging contemporary theories of cognitive science and semantics. The book demonstrates how the domains of meaning and philosophy can be addressed within any culture without reducing their intrinsic cultural significance.

By addressing these key aspects of Tantric traditions through this approach, this book initiates a much-needed dialogue between Indian and Western theories, while encouraging introspection with the Indic traditions themselves. It will be of interest to those studying and researching Religion, Philosophy and South Asian Culture.

Sthaneshwar Timalsina is Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at San Diego State University, USA.

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Tantric Visual Culture
A cognitive approach
Sthaneshwar Timalsina

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A cognitive approach

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This work engages the varied topics of Tantric visualization, Indian philosophies in general, and Tantric philosophy in particular, Indian esthetic theories, contemporary Western philosophy, cognitive science, and cognitive linguistics. In a departure from existing mainstream discourse, this study centers around images. I am thankful to Dr. Glen Alexander Hayes for the initial encouragement to read Tantric materials through the lens of cognitive science. This work is a consequence of a prolonged engagement with scholars working both in the field of religious studies and cognitive science.

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"Holographic Bodies and Metaphoric Limbs in Hindu Myths," *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Südasienstudien* 2, 167–86. 2012.

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Abbreviations

BAS	*Bhairavānukaraṇastava*
BĀU	*Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*
CGC	*Cidgaganacandrikā*
CS	*Cakrasaṃvara*
DAL	*Dhvanyāloka-Locana*
DM	*Devīmāhātmya*
NŚ	*Nāṭyaśāstra*
NṢA	*Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava*
PP	*Phenomenology of Perception*
RG	*Rasagaṅgādhara*
SD	*Sāhityadarpaṇa*
SL	*Saundaryalaharī*
ŚVT	*Śrīvidyārṇavatantra*
YH	*Yoginīhṛdaya*

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Introduction

This work combines Tantric studies with cutting-edge research on cognitive science. While on one hand it reflects my more than thirty-year engagement with Tantric practitioners in North India and Nepal coupled with an ardent desire to comprehend this complex and perplexing system, on the other, it expresses my intention to examine select visualization practices through a cognitive approach. As a faithful student of philology, I have in the past endeavored to understand texts within their own historical and cultural frameworks. In this book, I am attempting to transcend the traditional modes of reading by applying new methods to interpret the practice. A cross-pollination of disciplines without boundaries, I am convinced, has the potential to solve the problems in one discipline by utilizing a new set of tools developed in the other. To meet these expectations, this work brings together four different outlooks:

(i) emic self-understanding;
(ii) contemporary historiography;
(iii) theories of contemporary cognitive science, particularly metaphor and conceptual blending, and;
(iv) Indian classical esthetics.

While this poses a daunting challenge of introducing categories from different disciplines and utilizing them to make a coherent narrative, the objective is to show an alternative to the contemporary approaches to cultural studies, and the work here is therefore preliminary.

Originating in South Asia in approximately the fifth century CE, Tantric texts constitute a body of literature that teaches certain ritual activities and disciplines to initiated practitioners. These texts offer both specific guidelines for meditative practices as well as particular worldviews and philosophies that aim to transform the practitioner's outlook and response to the world. In general, each Tantric text addresses a primary deity, detailing how to invoke the deity through the use of sacred syllables (*mantra*) and visualization practices that incorporate abstract geometric images (*maṇḍala*). The results of performing such actions, according to practitioners, include both the achievement of magical powers or 'perfections' (*siddhis*) as well as self-realization.

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Tantra is a generic term that involves various esoteric practices of the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. Frequently, we find that some of these practices cross religious boundaries, so that even the deities, the rituals oriented towards those deities, and the results anticipated from such practices appear identical. Nevertheless, what distinguishes these disciplines is the overarching philosophical framework within which these seemingly identical practices are embedded. It is due to the internal philosophical diversity of this discourse, the complexity of its rituals, and inaccessibility of contemplative practices, that a unitary understanding of Tantra has eluded, and continues to elude, Western scholars.[1] In these pages, my objective is not to enter this debate. Instead, I will engage only the salient features of Tantric language and images with an intent to initiate a dialogue between various contemporary cognitive theories and Tantric literature. In order to orient the readers, this work offers a brief account of Tantric discourse and as well as selected contemporary cognitive approaches.

Some of the most salient features of Tantric discourse include the concept that the world is directly linked with the human body and that both are composed of the same cosmic energy. If this connection is recognized, so the texts claim, the human body and mind can interact with and affect the course of cosmic events. Many Śaiva and Śākta Tantras embody a monistic world-view wherein the central deity emanates in the form of the world. Thus, such traditions reject the oppositional dualism between matter and consciousness or body and self. Tantras are generally understood to be world-affirming: the bliss and consciousness that occur in cognitive and somatic experiences are in fact quintessential to Tantric transformation. These Tantric practices not only alter the subject's perception of reality, but they are also claimed to be effective in inducing or altering certain somatic states.[2]

This is where the scientific approach can contribute to our exploration. If these practices somehow grant a broader influence of the mind over the body or transform the subject's orientation towards himself and the world, not only should these effects be measurable and able to be analyzed, but this exploration should itself offer insights potentially of considerable significance to the study of a relationship between the mind and the body. Since the Tantric approach is not only cognitive but also involves emotions as an integral component of ritual performance and aims to teach the practitioner to cultivate specific emotions, this study also addresses the effects of Tantric practices on a subject's emotional response.

Foremost among Tantric practices is visualization or the formation of a mental image. Tantric rituals begin with the aspirant mentally 'seeing' various syllables and *mantras* in his own body. The practitioner imagines the syllables transforming into the image of the deity, then envisions the body of the deity either within the various centers of his body or in his mental frame of awareness. In some cases, he also visualizes specific geometric designs that correlate with the divine body. In these rituals of visualization, the body of the deity is viewed or imagined at the center of a *maṇḍala* or in the heart of the

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aspirant, with her associate deities being visualized in the surrounding area. As the sequence of visualization proceeds, the aspirant mentally enlivens the image or assumes it to be alive and performs ritual offerings. The goal of this complex practice is to experience the oneness of the aspirant, deity, and all that exists. In his mental space, the practitioner perceives the world as if it is emanating from the deity and then being reabsorbed within her.[3] What is explicit in the visualization process is an attenuated focus on the mind in creating reality, as the encounter with the deity occurring in the course of visualization is considered as real. This process of creating and manipulating mental images requires a heightened degree of cognitive attention.

This monograph addresses select aspects of Tantric language and the practice of visualization, and the central premise is to engage cognitive theories while studying images. In the course of this exploration, the focus on 'Tantric language' will also incorporate a detailed analysis of images, because in the Tantric discourse, images are central and conveying a greater understanding than can be accessed through words. Thus, what unfolds in the coming chapters is a dialogue between Tantric practices and a selection of contemporary cognitive approaches to language and images. Existing scholarship on Tantric traditions has paid little attention to the philosophical aspect of its visual culture, the ways in which images are intended to encode specific meanings. Yet, on the ground, visual images dominate Tantric culture, and visualization is central to Tantric practice.

Contemporary trends of scholarship in this area, however, primarily involve archaeological, text-historical, and sociological studies. An historical approach provides the social frame of reference and has helped contextualize meaning, albeit with limitations. A mere socio-cultural reading, however, cannot plumb the depths of Tantric literature, both visual and textual. In particular, when considering the visual culture, existing studies privilege archaeology and history, sidelining the hermeneutic and philosophical domains. Even the application of South Asian classical esthetic theories in the service of reading the visual culture has been relegated to the sidelines of Indological discourse. This work, therefore, is an attempt to move away from the dominant scholarly approach to reading Tantric culture.

In our times, cognitive science has made significant advancement in understanding human nature. By opening a dialogue between the discipline of Tantric studies and the disciplines of cognitive studies, linguistics, and consciousness studies, this research also aims to advance a rational scientific approach to the study of religions. Typically, however, the problem with such an approach is that it has strong tendencies towards an extreme materialistic reductionism that is both philosophically impoverished and dismissive of the self-understandings of the people and cultures it is studying. In contrast, in engaging a cognitive approach, my aim is not to enter hard reductionism, but to work in the areas where the exchange between two disciplines can be mutually productive. The present work thus aims to fill these lacunae by engaging classical Indian and contemporary Western philosophies, and current studies

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on cognitive sciences and its application in reading visual culture. This philosophical and cognitive analysis allows materials from Indian culture to be read in a new light, while at the same time engaging contemporary theories of cognitive science and semantics. This monograph thus attempts to demonstrate how rituals, images, and the language used to encode those rituals can be addressed without diminishing their intrinsic cultural significance.

A fusion of approaches, the main objective of this reading, does not consider cognitive scientific as 'Western' and classical Indian philosophy and esthetics as mere 'emic' perspectives. This work also deviates from existing trends by giving intrinsic cultural hermeneutics an equal status for deciphering meaning. My understanding is that a scientific outlook is universal in nature, grounded on truths that cannot be reduced to merely an academic or cultural perspective and placed in the service of the existing hierarchy of power. Rather than leading to a perplexity of incompatible perspectives, this inclusive application of approaches thus seeks to advance our understanding of culture and human nature.

Notes

1 For the history of Tantrism, see Goudriaan and Gupta 1981. For the concept of *mantra*, see Alper 1991; and Timalsina 2005 and 2010a. For an introduction to Tantra, see White 2000, 2001a, 2001b: 3–38; and Brooks 2001: 347–60. For an introduction to Hindu images, see Gopinath Rao 1968.
2 White 1993, Timalsina 2008, and Flood 2005.
3 For discussions on mental space, see Fauconnier 1985; Lakoff 1990; Hart 2007; and Fauconnier and Turner 1998: 133–87.

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Overview

While deciphering the meaning of the obscure Tantric language and images, it is essential to engage the intrinsic cultural hermeneutics, and this is because classical theories and practices have co-evolved, and an awareness of this reciprocal influence assists us in making an informed analysis. Contemporary scientific approaches are equally relevant because when addressing metaphor, metonymy, concept formation, or emotions, these provide insight into the preexisting theories from classical India that have given rise to these complex images. Tantras have been elusive as objects of study, not just because their practices are secretive, but also because the texts themselves defy linear reading. For instance, when the texts describe a *mantra*, they use select terms to refer to each syllable, requiring decipherment. A linguistic approach, in my understanding, brings to light the intricate issues of sign and reference embedded in Tantric language and at the same time attempts to uncover the coherent hermeneutical systems that make it possible to read these otherwise opaque texts. Over the course of this work, theories of metaphor and cognitive blend, metonymy, a holographic theory of epistemology with a focus on concept formation and its application to the study of myths and images, and the esthetic theory of *rasa* are examined so that we may read both texts and images in a new light.

The first chapter is entitled, "Mnemonics, Image Compression, and Tantric Visualization." Contemporary scholarship on Tantric studies has paid very little attention to the relationship between cognitive theory and deity images and *maṇḍalas*. The objects under consideration are different from secular mnemonic images. We can, however, analyze their application in Tantric visualization as mnemonic tools without reducing their religious context. Succinctly, a deity image reminds the practitioner of the entire Tantric system or the particular liturgy associated with the deity. These images are used to bring to mind a specific cosmology and to evoke distinct emotions that correspond to particular *maṇḍalas* and *mantras*. Furthermore, images are linked to each other, and one image can engender the memory of concepts linked to the entire system. It is thus not possible to engage a fruitful conversation on the cognitive domain of Tantric images without analyzing their mnemonic aspects.

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Drawing upon the cognitive metaphor theories of Turner, Lakoff, and Johnson, the second chapter, "Image and Metonymy," addresses the ways metonymic structures help us unravel the meaning of Tantric images. Contemporary studies in cognitive linguistics have established that metonymy is not a mere extension of metaphoric language and is central to the evolution of human consciousness. This means that we cannot understand the scope of linguistic expression by treating metaphors and metonymy as simply literary tropes. In plain language, both metaphor and metonymy relate to non-literal meaning. While we typically assume that there is a direct or a proper language adequate to describe empirical reality with exacting precision, in fact, many of our literal expressions actually rest on metaphor and metonymy. Terms such as 'black hole' or 'god-particle' from popular science exemplify this. In general, metaphor is a descriptive word or phrase used to describe something where the entity could have been described otherwise by direct language. Thus, for example, Sanskrit literature habitually refers to a heroic figure as *narapuṅgava*, a bull among men, as opposed to simply saying that such a figure is a really great guy. This example also demonstrates how metaphors are culturally grounded. In metonymy, words denoting something are replaced with the words that denote one aspect or one property of that entity, thus describing something by using language associated with a part of what is being described. For instance, eyes portray vision, a wheel demonstrates motion, and the crown signifies a monarch. By pointing out how the relation of one object to another in an image can be metonymically linked, this study *offers fresh insights* into *complex and arcane* Tantric images, *replete with multiple hands and heads.* In doing so, this chapter also exploits the learning of classical Sanskrit exegetes and their ways of theorizing about complex images. When viewed within this background, an historically sensitive reading of images provides us with deeper insight into the philosophical developments in classical India that paralleled the advance of the esthetic culture of image-making.

Building on our earlier explorations, the third chapter, entitled "Metaphor, Embodiment, and Tantric Images," offers an attempt to initiate a dialogue between the classical Indian theory of *lakṣaṇā* or secondary derivation where meaning is expressed through suggestion, and the contemporary cognitive metaphor theory of Turner, Lakoff, and Johnson.

The above two chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) thus deal with articulating what has been encoded in Tantric literature, ritual, and visualization. These chapters, however, do not engage with the process of the encoding itself in order to make sense of the esoteric Tantric language and its cryptology. The subsequent section aims to meet this need.

The next two chapters in this book address the ways concepts can be analyzed by first engaging the cognitive theory of conceptual blend and then exploring how a holographic approach to epistemology and cosmology can explain Tantric visualization. In Tantras, bodies are 'meaningful,' not only in the sense of merely being embodied, but also because of the way the body has

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been deciphered as a text. Whether an aspirant is viewing his own body in a particular way or gazing upon the divine body, visualization is an encounter of an embodied subject with other bodies, and a process where meaning is both encoded and deciphered. Tantric visualization of the body involves recognizing reality as embodied, understanding the cosmic correlation with the human body, and having both the cognitive and emotional domains transformed to accommodate this experience. Therefore, the deciphering of Tantric meanings layered upon the human body parallels the recognition of the oneness of the embodied and transcendent selves.

Following the above premise, the next chapter, "Blended Images in Tantric Visualization," utilizes the theory of conceptual blend advanced by Fauconnier and Turner to read often-graphic Tantric images. Rather than considering the integration of different pictures in the emergent structure as coincidental, Tantric practitioners utilize this cognitive faculty by making a conscious effort to blend different images in a manner that gives rise to considerable iconographic and conceptual complexities. As propounded by Fauconnier and Turner, the development of visual culture parallels the cognitive evolutionary trajectory. This application of a cognitive mechanism in the process of visualization offers a clue as to why Tantric practitioners create imagery with multiple heads and hands, with deities riding on top of various other deities. Fauconnier and Turner convincingly argue that new conceptual constructs emerge by blending pre-existing structures, and various inputs are borrowed from different sources in this process. The application of this theory in reading Tantric images sheds light on otherwise opaque forms. I also point out that the practitioners were somewhat familiar with this tendency of blending, as the images suggest a conscious integration of different aspects from different deities in the process of giving rise to new forms. This chapter also aims to contextualize the study of consciousness in order to address various philosophical issues, exploring examples from within Tantric culture.

The fifth chapter, "Holographic Limbs and Metaphoric Bodies in Hindu Myths," explores the concept of hologram in light of the arguments of David Bohm and Karl Pribram. In many temples, deities are displayed as a torso without the head, or just a head without the body. In some shrines, only the eyes represent the deity. A wide range of Hindu myths demonstrate that the body parts of deities or demons alike reconfigure as a new body. These myths also suggest an integration of multiple bodies into a single form. The argument of this chapter is that what underlies these myths is the overarching concept, shared throughout the Indian culture, that the body mirrors the cosmos and that 'one' and 'many' are just two modes of the same reality. Analyzing images thus returns us to the epistemological issue of how consciousness grasps and constitutes reality. Holographic models make sense of the process whereby parts are viewed as complete, representing the entire body. This analysis of the mythical bodies, I argue, complements our understanding of Tantric epistemology.

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Additionally, viewing cosmology as holographic helps answer some of the unresolved issues in anthropology as to why Hindu and Buddhist practitioners depict a deity by only representing eyes or a head, or worship particular limbs such as the feet, genitals, or even an ear. This chapter on holographic limbs engages the Tantric non-dual theory of concept formation in light of holographic epistemology and relates them to the analysis of images. The two chapters in this section (Chapters 4 and 5) thus engage emic understandings of concept formation and their application in Tantric practices.

The final stage in understanding Tantric language, particularly the language of images, is recognizing the way emotions are displayed in images and how emotion has been utilized within this tradition. Tantric philosophers have drawn extensively upon the esthetic theory of *rasa* that offers a uniquely South Asian cognitive and esthetic model for addressing emotion. By introducing *rasa* into this discussion, my aim is first to initiate an intra-school dialogue within the Indic traditions themselves and point towards the need for a broader theory to address emotions. While this approach is challenging, as there is not just one theory of *rasa* and not all arguments in the discourse of *rasa* are applicable to studying emotions, it is nonetheless rewarding. Engaging *rasa* theory to reading emotions not only helps initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue, it also facilitates reading visualization in light of the Indian theory of emotion and analyzing the culturally constructed aspects of emotion. This approach helps us escape the dualism of the mind and the body prevalent in the Cartesian school of thought, and address the intricate mind body relation in light of the Tantric philosophy of emotion. In other words, it allows us to understand consciousness from an embodied and phenomenal perspective, as traditionally advanced by *rasa* theory.

Keeping these issues in mind, the next section (Chapter 6) in this monograph, "Invoking Emotions: Reading Tantric Images in Light of *Rasa* Theory," explores the ways the classical esthetic theory of *rasa* assists in unraveling the meaning of Tantric images. The argument in this chapter is that the esthetic theory of *rasa* allows the viewer to comprehend these otherwise opaque images in a proper light. This marriage of two systems is not new, as multiple Tantric philosophers have written about esthetics. Reading the Tantric visual culture through the perspective of *rasa* also supports us in contextualizing the prevalence of representations that invoke negative emotions such as horror, disgust, or violence. Furthermore, it helps us address cultural experience by utilizing an emic framework. In this way, the text addresses six key aspects of Tantric traditions and explores how to meaningfully engage these topics. I conclude the text with some observations based on the analysis in the earlier chapters, and suggestions for future studies.

Contemporary Tantric studies needs to evolve from an exaggerated focus on hedonistic practices on one hand and the tendency of esotericization on the other. Although Tantric texts are very technical and any discourse on images or *mantras* can be extremely complicated for non-Indologists, the focus here is on a dialogue among disciplines, and the text has therefore

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refrained from making use of technical jargon as much as possible. These applications allow us to rethink Tantra, particularly Tantric images, and read their cognitive, psychological, philosophical, and linguistic domains.

The tension between a phenomenology of the sacred (manifestation) and the hermeneutics of religious language and discourse (proclamation), as outlined by Paul Ricoeur,[1] is worth mentioning in these introductory pages. By manifestation, Ricoeur means our religious experience is what develops in the process of making bonds between ourselves and the natural world. He means by proclamation the interpretation of such experiences in order to communicate them. Ricoeur argues that due to the way we experience the sacred as awesome, powerful, and overwhelming, it is ineffable. He then mentions that although we cannot describe the numinous as such, we can describe how it manifests itself. Ricoeur also categorizes rituals within the trait of manifestation of the sacred, acknowledging that the importance of ritual is found in experience itself and not in interpretation. He then addresses the role of symbols and metaphors for understanding both the place of humankind in the cosmos and God's presence in nature. The Tantric language of images and the practice of visualization fit very well in the parameters of manifestation and proclamation that Ricoeur identifies, because a closer look into the system of images makes it clear that these images are a product of experience, and their goal is to transform experience and stimulate distinctive responses of subjects in their engagement with the natural world and the sacred. These images form a distinct language, following the similar parameters of our natural language. However, I do not consider that these images are simply parts of ritual that embody experience. On the contrary, images capture the experience, the subject's aim to transform his own understanding of his body, as well as his experience of the natural world. Equally important, it also functions as a language to communicate experience that can be shared among initiates who aspire to cultivating the same experience. Reading images both as a distilled form of experience containing the tools for cultivating experience on the one hand and as a language to communicate experience on the other helps us identify the ways experience has been institutionalized and shared across times in different cultures.

Note

1 Ricoeur 1978: 13–35.

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Section 1

Image in the context of Tantric practice

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1 Mnemonics, image compression, and Tantric visualization

Mnemonics is the study of the systems linked with improving and assisting memory. While mnemonic devices have historically been of interest for people wanting to expand their capacity for recalling specific content, in recent years this has become a topic of interest for those addressing human cognition and memory in more general terms. As we shall see, in Indian Tantric culture, deity images and the geometric designs called *maṇḍalas* are used in a way that is comparable to mnemonic devices. While these images bear considerable religious and devotional significance, in the context of visualization practices they are utilized to evoke complex systems of signification, sometimes encompassing entire Tantric systems. The opacity of deity images in the Hindu culture has perplexed many people, and the extant studies have done very little to unravel the complexity of the visual culture. As will soon be made apparent, visual images play a central role in contemplative practice and are used to enhance attention and retain memory. Furthermore, such images are intertwined with imagination and the creative aspect of human cognition.[1]

Recent studies have established that visual images are powerful devices for enhancing memory.[2] The interaction of images with each other effectively consolidates the retention of meaning.[3] Bizarre images are found to remain in memory for a longer time than, for example, an esthetically appealing landscape.[4] Such insights, along with various related studies on human cognition and memory, have inspired me to explore the cognitive domain of Tantric visualization. This does not mean that contemplative practices and their philosophies provide only the raw materials for a newly emerging discipline. For scholars in religious studies, engaging cognitive aspects of images shifts our attention from the dominant historical and sociological perspectives and helps us describe the aspects that have remained misunderstood. In turn, through a plethora of case studies, ethnographic and textual materials validate the research of cognitive scientists. Moreover, various arguments from indigenous philosophies compel a reevaluation of our understandings regarding human cognitive behavior.

Before we engage with complex issues on Tantric rituals and their relevance to contemporary studies in the area of cognitive science, it is vital that we

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demonstrate that Tantric visualization fits the criteria of mnemonic techniques. For instance, entities to be recollected in these practices are spatialized, and categories are vertically or horizontally organized. The categories to be remembered are localized in the body through the ritual of 'installation' (*nyāsa*). Different limbs in the body thus relate to Sanskrit phonemes, various *mantras*, the underlying philosophical principles (*tattvas*), and the cosmic planes (*bhuvanas*). A contemporary finding suggests that spatialization is twice as effective in recollecting the items.[5] Accordingly, retrieval of memory is easier if its organization follows a systematized framework. In this process, 1) the items to be remembered are conceptualized in meaningful units, 2) arranged in a hierarchy, and 3) designated by the first letters of each article to create an acronym. All these techniques are used in Tantric visualization. Besides instructing the subject to complete a series of visual projections, liturgies and philosophical texts also prescribe the cultivation of specific emotions or their absence. Experiments suggest that a balanced state of mind achieved through various mindfulness practices also leads to more effective recollection.[6]

What is common to all Tantric visualization practices is repeating *mantras* while actively imagining the divine bodies or geometric designs called *maṇḍalas*. In order to create experiences that are felt to be real, Tantric practice relies on bringing to mind both image and speech. Within the realm of mental representation, Allan Paivio introduced a dual-coding theory where two alternative verbal and non-verbal methods represent events.[7] Our concepts, following this theory, can be held both in images and words. The dual-coding theory demonstrates that lasting memory can be created by the use of both image and words. While images can evoke information simultaneously, words follow one after another in recall. Accordingly, words are used also to describe mental images. Verbal memory rests on a different system than the analogous codes utilized in images that allow the mind to preserve in memory an almost identical imprint of what has been experienced. Although dual-coding theory has some limitations,[8] the central claim that memory can be enhanced by use of both image and word remains unchallenged. The Tantric visualization that primarily rests on utilizing both words and images can, in this sense, be seen in light of Paivio's thesis. In the context of visualization, when images are recalled, the texts or *mantras* are actively attained, and when texts are played simply out of memory, images are recalled. What is unique to this model is the activation of different cognitive processes at the same time.

Speech is the primary device of visualization in Tantras. Rather than simply recalling words, visualization practice uses *mantras* as a template for contemplating various other categories. Further imprinting the process of recollection, *mantras* are not just simply 'heard,' remembered, or brought forth through recall, but rather, they are mentally situated in different parts of the body and 'seen' as images. Speech and image merge in a single cognitive domain, as the speech becomes very subtle at the stage of *paśyantī*.[9] This level of speech, following grammarians and Tantric philosophers, merges speech

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and vision, where words are 'seen' in the screen of mind. Meditations upon speech meticulously cultivate subtle states where the 'sound' aspect of words collapses and are merely observed. In this state, language-like description and picture-like codes are merged and perceptual and auditory modalities become one.

Thanks to the cognitive scientists, various aspects of mental mechanisms are known today that were not available even a few decades ago. This facilitates exploration of the internal domain of some of these meditative practices, particularly the relationship of image to speech, in this case *mantra*. An understanding of the techniques adopted by Tantric practitioners to explore the deeper layers of mind where language and image converge contributes valuable insight into the current controversy over whether mental images resemble perception that uses analogous (visual) code, or images that use propositional (verbal) code. Another interesting parallel can be found between the animation of images in Tantric practice and the mental rotation of images identified by the cognitive scientists. Johnson (1990) outlines the stages of mental rotation, where the subjects first create a mental image of an object, rotate the object mentally until a comparison is possible, then compare and contrast and make a decision.[10] While these cognitive mechanisms are at play in every decision-making act, visualization creates a scenario where subjects learn to observe their own mental state while undergoing these processes.

Thus, Tantric images resemble cognitive maps that integrate information acquired through various perceptual modes. The process whereby the practitioner generates deity images and performs rituals by means of visualization parallels the mechanisms involved in spatial cognition, including the acquisition, organization, utilization, and revision of our awareness about spatial environments. These processes of spatial cognition are integral to everyday decision-making and common to cognitive behavior. Essentially, what Tantric traditions do is they ritualize these common cognitive aspects and embed them in a precise and coherent system of praxis. Tantric practice involves imagination, manipulation of images, integration of different inputs in a single cognitive domain, activation of a particular emotion that corresponds to the cultivation of a specific image called to mind, retention of the projected images for particular span of time, and integration of complex cosmologies and philosophies during the course of visualization. Besides prescribing rituals, Tantric practitioners often provide their own commentary upon these highly systematized processes, thereby offering sophisticated meta-reflections on under-examined aspects of ordinary human cognition only recently identified by cognitive scientists. These reflections help us understand the parameters in which such rituals were carried out. In turn, the manuals of visualization and practitioner's reflections upon their own practice offer us first-hand information on altered states of consciousness, and provide insight into deeper phenomenal states that are hard to observe objectively in the laboratory.

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Many of the techniques applied in Tantric visualization are also utilized in developing mnemonic devices. The simultaneous availability of an image and its parts and the sequential act of speech allow Tantric practitioners to integrate speech in visual forms. *Maṇḍalas* and sometimes even the deity images come with various *mantras* inscribed upon them. In the process of visualization, all of the essential *mantras* of a system are frequently viewed within the body of the practitioner, and when the subject undergoes meditation, he can experience the simultaneous presence of all *mantras* as parts of the body. While *maṇḍalas* can be suddenly 'given' in a flash of awareness and *mantras* are sequentially recited, both merge in the practice of visualization. Likewise, the Tantric ritual of *dhāraṇā* or retaining images from the external input, and a creative drawing of the phonemes, diagrams, or images parallel the application of eidetic images that are found to last in the mind for a longer time, even after the removal of the external source.[11] Due to cognitive de-differentiation or the infusion of processes that ordinarily function in isolation, eidetic imagery is compared to synesthesia. The analogy between eidetic images, dual-processing, and the concept of *paśyantī* is crucial for a cognitive analysis of Tantric visualization. This is where language and image constitute an integral dimension of cognition.

Additionally, Tantric manuals prescribe the visualization of sequentially complex imagery. Even in regards to a single deity, for instance the goddess Tripurā from the tradition of Śrīvidyā, over the course of a sequence of visualizations, the image invoked successively progresses from a simple image of the goddess with two arms, to a goddess with four, sixteen, or a hundred and eight arms. As the visualization progresses, the goddess is seen with a single head or up to sixteen and the number of weapons the deity carries also increases. At the same time, the seat upon which the deity is enthroned also becomes increasingly intricate and complex. In essence, the field of attention expands as the meditation progresses. Crucial to this progression is an integration of different inputs that gives rise to a single image of the deity. This process of visualization evokes Fauconnier's theory of conceptual blending. The graphically visual culture of Tantra demonstrates findings made in the scientific field of cognitive study on introspection, image formation, concepts, retention of imagery, and the mechanisms at play when organizing imagery for long-term memory. The select examples outlined above illustrate that hitherto unexplained aspects of Tantric rituals and philosophies can be better understood, if findings from the cognitive domain are engaged.

Linguistic and contemplative philosophies provide the backdrop for much of Tantric practice. Indic philosophers such as Bhartṛhari and Abhinavagupta, the latter being one of the greatest theorists of Tantric practice, offer analysis that not only helps to explain the presuppositions of Tantric rituals, but also provides valuable insight into the nature of the human mind. This opens up a greater exchange and dialogue between contemporary cognitive theories and Tantric philosophies and practices.

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Enlivening the Śrī Cakra[12]

This section details the meditative practice within the pantheon of Tripurā. While there are particular aspects specific to every deity, they all follow the same framework. For this reason, addressing one visualization in detail will provide us with a template for further observation and analysis. As we shall see, salient features in this visualization are shared with the more familiar meditation practices of Patañjalian Yoga. Thus after briefly addressing the commonalities shared by these traditions, I will then distinguish the salient features of Tantric visualization.

Patañjali identifies the fixation of mind in a particular locale as 'concentration' (*dhāraṇā*), and 'meditation' (*dhyāna*) as the continuation of a single flow of consciousness that is focused on a single object.[13] Tantras additionally introduce new terms such as 'visualization' (*bhāvanā*), 'recollection' (*anusmaraṇa*), 'memory' (*smaraṇa*), and 'imagination' (*kalpanā*). Most manuals outline the visualization of the deity with the imperative terms derived from √*dhyai* for meditation, √*smṛ* for recollection, √*kṛp* for imagination, and other similar roots. Although the act of meditation is the same, Patañjalian and Tantric processes differ in terms of the utilization of images. In particular, rather than directing the practitioner to fix his attention on a single object, Tantras offer a sequence of objects upon which he is to meditate. Similarly, in reciting *mantras* in Tantric traditions, there is not a focus on a single *mantra* or a single concept, but rather on its repetition, creating a chain of similar concepts in the awareness of the practitioner.[14] Tantric visualization primarily relies on creating and retaining successive similar concepts. This practice requires imagination, as it prescribes the integration of different inputs, animation of objects by considering the image as a living breathing entity, and engagement by the practitioner with the object of meditation. Instead of identifying Tantric visualization with Patañjalian *dhyāna*, I would therefore relate it to *anusmṛti*. This recollective mode of consciousness plays a central role in yogic systems that existed earlier than Patañjali, as it is with his *Yogasūtra* that *anusmaraṇa* is eliminated from the list of meditational practices.[15] Essential to Tantric visualization are the singular aspects of recollecting the deity image or her *maṇḍala*, mentally drawing the image or *maṇḍala*, creating a dialogue with the deity image by considering her to be alive and giving various mental offerings, evoking positive emotions of devotion or love (as well as other emotions such as arousal in a controlled environment), and remembering the correlation between specific aspects of *mantra* or image with its corresponding philosophy and cosmology. Rather than the isolation (*kaivalya*) of the self with the binding principles, as is the goal of Patañjalian meditation, Tantric visualization seeks a direct encounter (*sākṣātkāra*) or an experience of the identity of the deity and the self.

In order to demonstrate the process of Tantric visualization and to highlight its distinctness from Patañjalian meditation, I would like to briefly address the visualization of Tripurā with a focus on her image (*vigraha*), *maṇḍala*, and

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mantra. In so doing, I am keeping in mind the mnemonic process and rather than addressing the rituals associated with Tripurā exhaustively, I am itemizing only the features that are crucial to understanding the cognitive domains. What we observe in this practice is a template that is shared among all other Tantric visualizations: they all have their specific *mantras*, *maṇḍalas*, and particular forms to visualize, and their visualization practice follows the same pattern in the form of an 'internal worship' (*antaryāga*).

The goddess Tripurā is visualized in her most popular form in four arms carrying a rope, goad, bow, and arrows made of flowers. She is sitting atop Sadāśiva (who in turn sits atop Īśvara and other principal deities). Often times, she is invoked as Kāmeśvarī, the mistress of desire, and sits on the lap of Kāmeśvara. Multiple layers of deities form the lower strata of her seat, suggesting her sovereignty over them. The manuals indicate that the goddess and her consort Śiva are identified with the two highest principles (*tattvas*), Śiva and Śakti, among the 36 principles.[16] Sadāśiva and Īśvara, two among

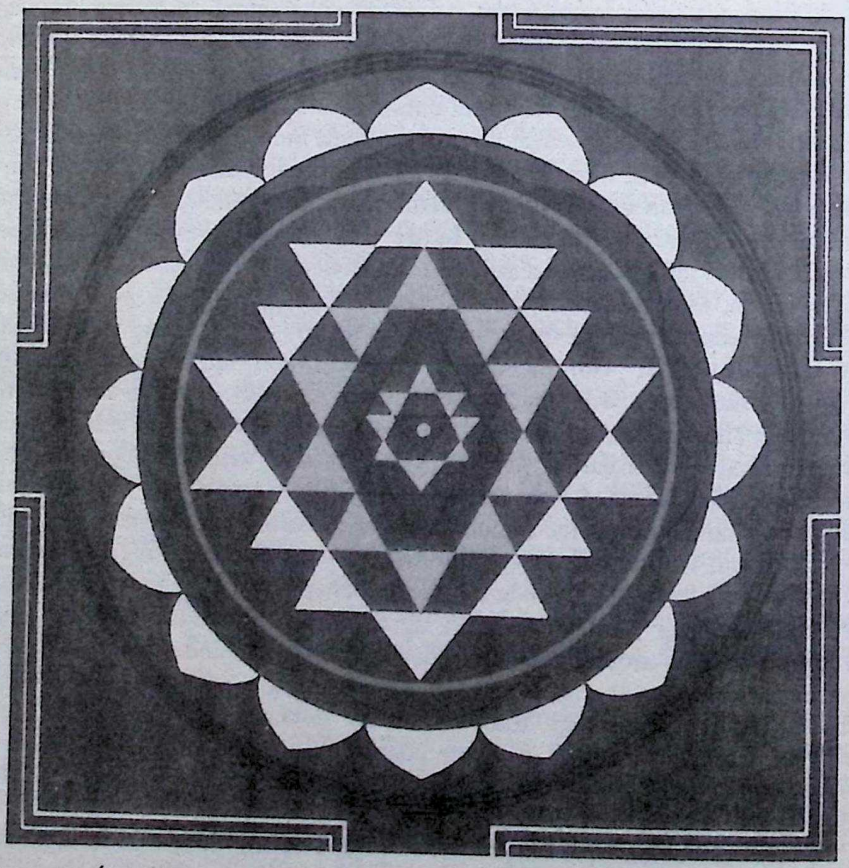

Figure 1.1 Śrī Cakra

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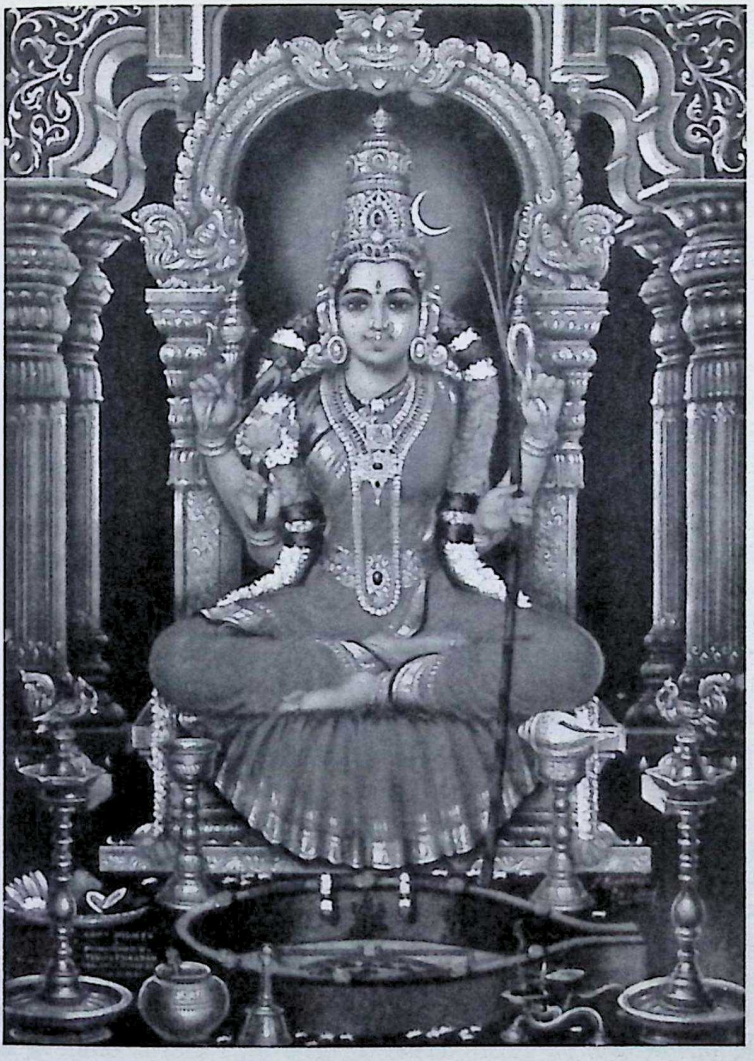

Figure 1.2 Tripurā

the deities providing seats, also figure as Tantric principles (34th and 33rd). By equating the seats with successive strata of Tantric cosmology, the goddess is the cause and controller of all the categories. To 'see' the goddess with the mind's eye thus recalls the entire philosophical scaffolding. The vertical organization of the seat of the goddess also reflects the way the cosmos evolves, with the higher principles giving rise to the ones in the lower strata. This process clearly demonstrates the spatialization of categories also found in mnemonic techniques.

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This visualization becomes more and more complex as the practice and the evocation of *mantras* progress. The most fundamental of her *mantras* is that comprised of fifteen letters, and these phonemes are viewed as identical to the body of the goddess and her *maṇḍala*, Śrī Cakra. Without going into detail of what goes on in visualization while reciting this *mantra*, central aspects to be recollected alongside the articulation of the fifteen phonemes are:

1 Place the deity image in the heart of the aspirant.
2 Visualize the body (both of the aspirant and the deity) as identical to the Śrī Cakra, and establish the correlation of the phonemes of the *mantra* within specific parts of the Cakra.
3 Visualize the deities associated with the specific groups of phonemes and find the correlation of these deities with the Cakra.
4 Attain awareness of the most subtle aspects of time successively fragmented into more and more subtle units and recollect the deity image, her *maṇḍala*, and the *mantra* in a single flash of consciousness.[17]
5 Cultivate an awareness of the sixfold categories identified as the 'paths' (*adhvans*), that are viewed within the body of the practitioner. This process is called 'installation' (*nyāsa*).
6 Establish an awareness of oneness of the deity, preceptor, and aspirant.
7 In every cognitive mode, what is given is an object and its awareness, and both are witnessed by the transcendent mode of consciousness. Focus on this aspect of consciousness. Expand the duration of this experience by the recognition that consciousness is the essential thread that weaves together all the cognitive modes.

As the practice progresses, the entire Śrī Cakra and the image of the goddess are compressed, visualized in a single flash of consciousness. What makes this practice cognitively challenging is that the above listed items of visualization are activated in a single stream of consciousness in addition to reciting the fifteen-syllable *mantra* of the goddess.[18] The next step in visualizing Śrī Cakra involves bringing to mind all the deities in the area surrounding the goddess. Sixteen Nityā goddesses, for instance, surround the innermost triangle. Since each of these deities has her own specific visualization, rituals and *mantras*, viewing the goddess Tripurā alongside her associates in a single flash of consciousness presupposes recollecting the entire system. By repeated association of *mantra* with a particular image, the viewer can replace one aspect to the other at will, 'seeing' the *mantra* as an image and vice versa.

Visualization becomes further involved when referencing texts such as *Yoginīhṛdaya* (YH) or *Varivasyārahasya*. These texts call for a focus on the six-fold or sixteen-fold meanings of the *mantra*.[19] Following YH, this *mantra* recitation parallels bringing to mind a list of concepts:

1 Affirmation of the oneness of Śiva and Śakti. Both these principles are identified with the self-awareness that is both transcendent and immanent.

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2 Recognizing the correlation between the *mantra* and the Śaivite categories (36 in total).
3 Establishing the oneness of the self and the supreme divinity (Tripurā in this context).
4 Realizing the oneness of the *mantra* and Śrī Cakra.
5 Identification of the subject consciousness with the transcendental consciousness.
6 Identification of the *mantra* and *kuṇḍalinī*, the serpentine force representing the *prāṇic* energy. Each individual, following Tantras, embodies the totality of the cosmic forces in its dormant form. *Kuṇḍalinī* represents this energy. This step of practice identifies speech or *mantra* with the cosmic energy.

Mantra, in this light, is a device that is used to bring to mind more than what natural language allows. When multiple texts are engaged to decipher the same *mantra*, we can conclude that *mantras* are used similar to mnemonic devices in order to recollect what the subject finds essential to remember.

As for the image of the deity, it also does not have a fixed form. In order to integrate complex categories in the list of memory, or expand the scope of visualization, Tantric practitioners bring to mind complex images of the deity. For instance, the image of Tripurā is viewed with sixteen or 54 arms, in addition to the goddess being visualized with one thousand arms and heads. Ritual manuals suggest complex meanings of visualizing the multiple arms. For instance, the image of the goddess with sixteen arms expands the scope of meaning from the one with four arms. The four attributes of Tripurā are associated with the mind (the bow), passion (the rope), aversion (the goad), and the functions of the five sensory faculties (the arrows). The deity with sixteen arms embodies an additional three deities, those of creation, sustenance, and reabsorption, identified as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra. To visualize the deity with sixteen arms thus brings to mind sixteen different roles the goddess plays. The deity with 54 arms and 16 faces represents the integral form of all the sixteen Nityā deities while also representing the digits of the moon. Besides other attributes, the goddess in this advanced visualization carries the eight Mātṛkā and ten Mahāvidyā deities. To bring this complex imagery of Tripurā to mind is thus equivalent to remembering all these divinities. The only difference is, when viewed in this consolidated image, all the deities (as well as their systems) are brought to mind simultaneously.

Just like the *mantra* and her image, the *maṇḍala* of the goddess, identified as Śrī Cakra, is used in the same way to recollect all her essential aspects. It has been outlined above that the goddess, her *mantra*, and the Śrī Cakra are identified in the visualization of Tripurā. This *maṇḍala*, in her pantheon, represents the cosmos and reflects the human body. The geometric design comprised of nine intersecting triangles and two circles of eight and sixteen petals enclosed by four gates is also a blueprint for the shrine of the goddess. This *maṇḍala* hosts all the emanations of Tripurā, surrounded by Mātṛkās, Bhairavas, and the protective deities. Meditating upon a *maṇḍala* consists of viewing the goddess at the center, with her intimately close emanations

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encircling the triangular seat around the geometric center. Deities encircle the goddess in numbers of eight, ten, ten, and fourteen triangles, along with those populating the lotuses (with eight and sixteen petals) and the gates. Viewing a *maṇḍala* is thus enacting the imagery of all the divinities surrounding the shrine. Making the act of visualization further complex, manuals identify the seed syllables and particular phonemes assigned to each of the centers. Viewing the *maṇḍala* thus becomes a complex ritual of walking through the mental space where different names and forms are located in particular gates and shrines inside the big complex. The practitioner walks through the constructed mental space and encounters different deities seated in their specific shrines, greeting them with their *mantras*. What is explicit in this detail is the compression of multiple concepts into a single image so that the practitioner can remember it at will. In this sense, analyzing Tantric visualization as a mnemonic practice facilitates the comprehension of complex rituals in a cognitive framework.

Cognitive engineering: mnemonic domains of visualization

A number of arguments can be made regarding the cognitive process involved in the above-mentioned visualization of Tripurā. Most important is the overlap between imagining and remembering, as these two processes are equally activated in visualization. Studies on human cognition provide further ways to analyze how the different cognitive modes can be integrated. Schacter and Addis (2007) have strongly argued that there is a considerable overlap in the cognitive processes of memory and imagination. The practice of visualization, traditionally identified as *anusmṛti* or *bhāvanā*, evokes both these aspects. As memory, it brings to mind something that has been learned earlier, and as imagination, it is a constructive process of encountering what has been given through memory. In this process, the image is considered a living breathing entity with which the practitioner engages in a dialogical relation, animating the constructs given as concepts. While the various categories and the group of deities and their corresponding *mantras* are learned earlier and are recollected, the correspondence of different *mantras* and deities, the animation of the deity in a sense of bringing the image to life and making ritual offerings, establishing connection between the self and the deity, and various other categories, all rest on imagination.

If the Tantric practice of visualization is understood following the above description, what lies in long-term memory – the entire cosmology that weaves the subject and his surroundings within the mental planes of the observer, and the complex philosophies and meticulous correlations of their categories – is brought to short-term memory at the moment of activation through ritual. Imagination plays a crucial role in formation and activation of both these memories. These processes also allow the mind to synthesize abstract concepts and incorporate complex ideas within a single concept.

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The quality of memory and imagination rests on the attentive state of consciousness, and the practice of meditation meticulously instructs the practitioner how he can enhance his attentive power. Attention describes the directionality of consciousness towards its intentional object. It is common knowledge that discrete consciousness lacks directionality, and as a form of passive knowing, does not constitute memory. This intricate relation between memory and attention also has an overlap in Sanskrit language, where *dhyāna* or synonyms such as *anusmṛti* are used to describe both attention and memory.

Two of the contemporary theories of attention, one based on limitation in the conscious subject's capacity to engage with multiple thoughts, and the action-based theories that describe attention in terms of performing a single action, both illuminate some of the nuances involved in visualization. The visualization process is unique in that multiple objects are attained in a single flash of consciousness. The practice of visualization thus identifies that attention is distinct from volition; it is not consciousness itself but a mode of it, and is nonetheless distinct from states of consciousness such as perceiving or dreaming. When one is visualizing, one is also being attentive to the images and sounds that play in the mind. Jess Prinz (2005) and Stanislas Dahaene (*et al.* 2006) argue that the primary role of attention is to project already-processed representations to working memory. In their understanding, the content that comes to conscious awareness is what is projected to working memory. The focus on attention during the course of visualization can be explained in this light: these practices are to constitute memories of the imagined entities so that they become more and more real.

While attention provides coherence or assists in determining a particular action, with a resultant affinity with functional theories, the complex processing that occurs in *maṇḍala* visualization with *mantra* recitation where multiple entities are simultaneously brought to mind through *anusmṛti*, or *dhyāna*, cannot be reduced to contemporary models of attention. Addressing what constitutes memory, Vaiśeṣika philosophers outline that there are three distinct types of *pratyayas*, or concepts: *paṭu*, *abhyāsa*, and *ādara*. *Paṭu* refers to the heightened mode of attention occurring during the rise of concepts. Accordingly, experiences to which great attention is paid constitute more lasting *saṃskāras*. *Abhyāsa* refers to the *saṃskāras* generated by repetition of the same concept. Accordingly, even the concepts given lesser attention can constitute lasting *saṃskāras* if they are replayed in the mind. The next, *ādara*, relates to surprise, stupification, wonder, shock, or horror.[20] Vātsyāyana provides a larger list for the cause of *saṃskāras* that can be broadly analyzed by applying schemata theory. In the context of visualization, the same concept (*pratyaya*) is regenerated in different forms by repetition, attention, and generating supportive emotions.

Attention and short-term visual memory are deeply interlinked. *Mantras* are generally comprised of limited letters and can be read in 30 seconds. This is about the same time-frame given by cognitive scientists for the extension of

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short-term visual memory. Tantric practices, however, evolve, as they aim to stretch the interval of attentive consciousness and thereby expand the capacity of short-term memory. When longer *mantras* are recited, meticulous effort is given to having the entire text memorized so that all the phonemes can be brought forth in the mind's eye in a flash of consciousness. The technique rests on compression and transformation of the text to image. This economy in time by transformation of text to image allows the practitioner to view the entire *mantra* in his mental space in a single flash of consciousness, even when the *mantras* are longer. This compression is just the beginning of what lies ahead, as the subject is instructed to bring the active presence of given cosmologies and different correlates of *mantra* into the same instantaneous time span. In light of this alternative perspective on the duration and scope of memory, the so-called "capacity limit of visual short term memory" (Todd and Marlos 2004) needs to be revisited, as the meticulous practice of visualization that evolved over millennia suggests otherwise. These practices also prescribe simultaneously activating multiple domains of reference, deviating from the ways attention has been understood today.

One of the points for the cognitive scientists to take home from this analysis is that the structures and images utilized in the storage and retrieval of memory help us analyze the issue of what makes some images more memorable than others, which Isola, Parikh and other scholars have examined.[21] These scholars have argued that images of enclosed spaces containing people with visible faces are easier to remember at a later time compared to images of vistas and peaceful scenes. Visualizing *maṇḍalas* fully exploits this technique. Studies have also revealed that bizarre factors aid memory preservation and retrieval. It is interesting to see that Tantric image processing applies all of the above-mentioned techniques and organization, including bizarre elements in the images, and enclosed structures where images are viewed.

The process whereby graphic details of visualization activate in memory the entire teachings of a particular school by means of some basic conceptual structure helps to shed light on the area of organizational memory. The subject's autonomy over the entities of recall and his organizational ability to retain and recall the experiences from the past are two different poles of the same issue, of the role organization plays in recall.[22] It has been known for quite some time (Perkins 1932: 473–90) that memory organization tends towards symmetry and balance. Organizing objects to be remembered in a coherent structure (as has been observed in the visualization techniques) reflects the same theme of the centrality of symmetric organization.

While the debate over localized or distributed memory is not over, recent research in neurology and human cognitive behavior suggests that verbal and visual memories are stored in two different lobes of the brain. The Tantric strategy to incorporate image and language in generating memory images demonstrates what constitutes a strong memory experience. The goal of such practice is to create an experience during which the subject undergoes a direct encounter in the act of visualization. In this process, the subject's mode of

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consciousness shifts from imagination to recollection, giving the subject a sense of direct encounter, whether it is that of the deity brought to the mind, or any other object.

In creating mnemonic tools for remembering the entire system, Tantric visualization has compressed multiple images and texts. This process has not only integrated different aspects of the same deity and created a single image that narrates all her roles and aspects, various deities are compressed within a single image. I will address this aspect in a separate chapter, when exploring the theory of cognitive blend, as proposed by Fauconnier. For the present context, image and schemata play crucial roles in shaping both cognition and memory. These are the products of our attention and shape deeper levels of cognition.[23] We perceive our environment based on given parameters of pre-attentive order. By re-shaping reality in a specific way, Tantric practitioners are conditioning their perception, where the experiences they have and the reality they live in are interlinked with the experiencing subject. Tantric subjects, along these lines, are not just situated in reality but are also its creators.

When these skillfully constructed structures are considered as mental images, cognitive scientists will have to revisit the standard theory that 'mental images are representations,' (Richardson 1980), since the images Tantric practitioners construct in mind are distinct from the images derived from retinal contact. Furthermore, the orthodox model of dissociating verbal memory and mental imagery falls short when dealing with Tantric literature which outlines a synesthetic representation, wherein speech and vision become one at the level of *paśyantī* or the speech that is seeing, which then culminates in the transcendent state of 'experiencing' alone (identified with the term *parā* and deified as Parā). Tantric philosophers consider it a non-dual state, where the dichotomy of subject and object collapses. Due to the integration of cognitive faculties that are otherwise giving rise to distinction, Tantric philosophers identify this altered state of consciousness as the commingling of fluids (*samarasa*), union (*yoga*), the great void (*mahāśūnya*), and so on. In this state, there is just an active mode of consciousness in terms of experiencing, and the dichotomy of subject and object does not exist.

As an image generated in the mind, the three visual forms of *mantra*, *maṇḍala*, and deity converge in a single image that does not exist in the outside world. When evoked, not all aspects of this image may manifest in the mind, and a partial image will then stand for the concept. The gradual cultivation of images in visualization thus provides textual and ethnographic material for advancing our understanding of concept formation.[24] There are some images, particularly of the deity *maṇḍalas* but sometimes of the deity alone, that come inscribed with *mantras*. This integration of image and speech depicts the complex visualization process where different modes of recollection are merged.

In essence, visualization is one of the central constituents of Tantric practice, and engaging the cognitive approach allows us to address some of its archaic aspects. While the images visualized consist of deities and *maṇḍalas* that are associated with ritual practice, the materials incorporated in the progressive

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stages of visualization provide insight into how mnemonics has played a role in developing these Tantric practices. The two-fold goals of visualization are to have a direct-encounter (*sākṣātkāra*), and have the transformative effects, including magical powers called 'perfections' (*siddhis*). The direct-encounter type of experience can be generated by meticulous visualization. The experiences engendered by repeated practice can be so strong that the boundary between memory derived from encountering something phenomenal and that cultivated through the practice of visualization collapses. Through these deep contemplative practices, one's self-estimation and response to the world and various stimuli are remapped, allowing the individual to engineer his own experience.

Notes

1 For imagination and visualization, see Timalsina 2014; McGinn 2004; Brann 1991; Casey 1976, 2000; Flanagan 2000; Harris 2000; Kosslyn 1996; O'Shaughnessy 1981; Pylyshyn 1981; Sartre 1966; Scruton 1974; Strawson 1970; and Warnock 1976.
2 Einstein and McDaniel 2004.
3 Esgate and Groome 2005. See also Benjafield 2007.
4 Worthen 2006.
5 Groninger 1971: 161–63.
6 Carson and Langer 2006: 29–34.
7 Paivio 1971, 1986, 1991. See also Johnson *et al.* 1996: 115; and Thomas 2011.
8 For criticism of Paivio's theory, see Sternberg 2003.
9 For a detailed analysis of *paśyantī*, see Padoux 1990; and Iyer 1992.
10 For the contemporary studies on mental images, see Sternberg 2006 and Shepard 1982.
11 For groundbreaking works on mental imagery, see the *Journal of Mental Imagery*. See Akhter 1977 for eidetic imagery and the formation of language.
12 For a general introduction to *yantra/cakra*, see Rabe 2001: 434–46; and Lidke 2011: 248–57.
13 For discussions on *dhāraṇā* and *dhyāna*, see Whicher 1993, 1998; Vasudeva 2004; and Grönbold 1996.
14 What Patañjali prescribes as the continuation of a single stream of consciousness (*pratyayaikatānatā*) needs to be explained, whether he meant the duration of a single concept (*pratyaya*) over the span of time or a sequence of similar supportive concepts.
15 *Sati* or *smṛti* in Buddhist meditative practices, *anusmṛti* in subsequent Tantric texts or the use of *tarka* for similar discursive methods have a different significance and history. When discussing yoga, *Mahābhārata*, a text much earlier than the *Yoga-sūtra* of Patañjali, lists *smṛti* as a yogic limb. For further discussion, see Gyatso 1992.
16 For the visualization of Tripurā, see *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava*. For the manual for visualizing Tripurā's seats as 36 principles, see *Śrīvidyārṇavatantra*. For a detailed exposition of the symbolism of Tripurā *mantra* and her gestures, see *Yoginīhṛdaya*. For studies on Tripurā, see Brooks 1990.
17 I am referring to the meditative practice outlined in the *Yoginīhṛdaya*, particularly the section on *mantra*, with regard to the attention on aspects of time.
18 Commentators wrestle over the particular *mantra* recited during this course. The *mantra* that begins with the letter /ha/ is called Hādi that reads as ha-sa-ka-la-hrīṃ-ha-sa-ka-ha-la-hrīṃ-sa-ka-la-hrīṃ, and the one that starts with /ka/ is called Kādi, and it reads as ka-e-ī-la-hrīṃ-ha-sa-ka-ha-la-hrīṃ-sa-ka-la-hrīṃ.

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19 For a detailed analysis of the visualization of *mantra* in the tradition of Tripurā, see Timalsina 2005. The way *mantras* are used to recollect the entire system, without being confined in a linear sense of meaning, can be compared with the memory device *lukasa* of the Luba people (Roberts and Roberts 1996: 22–35, 101–3). For the discourse on *mantra* and gender, see Biernacki 2007.
20 For discussion, see *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* (625–26); *Nyāyalīlāvatī* (p. 862).
21 For studies, see Isola *et al.* 2011: 145–52.
22 Two fronts of this issue are discussed by Argyris and Schon (1978: 11), who on one hand argue that organizational memory is only a metaphor or that an organizational strategy do not contribute to memory and on the other, Sandelands and Stablein (1987: 136) who argue that organizations are mental entities capable of thought.
23 Tuan 1975.
24 See Tall and Vinner 1981: 151–69.

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Section 2

Image, metonymy, and metaphors

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2 Metonymic structure of Tantric images

The ingenuity of the human mind has been expressed in art since the beginning of civilization, whether in Paleolithic cave paintings or the pyramid sphinx depicting a man-lion. Tantric culture is very recent by comparison. This culture, however, has kept the discourse of images vibrant in the realm of the sacred. Besides the statues in shrines and *maṇḍalas* populated with deity images, Tantric practice heavily relies on visualization. This practice consists of projecting mental images, their animation, and various mental activities that include treating these images as alive. In addition to constructing and animating images in the mental space, this process also involves deciphering them, or finding correlations between the deity image and the aspirant's worldview.

The following summary of Kṣemarāja's (11th C.) portrayal of the image of Bhairava can explain these complex processes.[1]

> By carrying the skull of Brahmā, the deity displays his fivefold powers of awareness, bliss, will, knowledge, and action, and by holding contradictory elements, the deity depicts harmony. With his opened eyes, Bhairava portrays immanence; his skull cup filled with blood depicts the paradoxical nature of Bhairava consciousness that is always in the transcendent state while being actively engaged with his senses turning outwards towards objects. Cremation ground, the residence of Bhairava, signifies pure consciousness; the deity's garland of hands and heads portrays that individual identities dissolve in Bhairava; and the entrails the deity wears depict bodily bondage. The lion's skin draped over his body signifies the illusory nature of the world; and the sword the deity carries corresponds to the removal of mental constructs. The shield of Bhairava represents protection from fear, and the rope stands for time. The hook signifies the all-encompassing Bhairava nature of bliss and awareness; the bow and arrows demonstrate the reabsorption of the gods in the lower realms into the deity; the gestures of boons and fearlessness portray the liberating nature of the deity; the skull-staff stands for the self as the foundation of creation; the musical instruments the deity carries such as lute, bell, and drum represent control over mental constructs; the trident refers to the triadic deities; and the bolt signifies that Bhairava consciousness pervades

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> all manifestations. Bhairava's stick portrays command, and his club and axe signify the removal of duality. The deity holding a citron suggests that consciousness is the seminal nature of the world. The nudity of Bhairava stands for his freedom, and his dark color relates to his all-absorbing nature. His third eye portrays the witnessing nature of the self even when immersed in sensory pleasure.[2]

The scope of this chapter is neither to itemize the ways images have been portrayed in Tantras, nor to decipher them following classical or contemporary readings. From the above depiction of Bhairava, what needs to be answered is, how does Kṣemarāja arrive at this complex relationship of signifiers? And, what faculty underlies this process while developing opaque images with perplexing forms? In this chapter, the cognitive approach to Tantric images seeks to unravel the conceptual framework at play in emergence and sustenance of Tantric visual culture and the practice of visualization.

In addition to Tantric images being religious symbols, these express the ingenuity of the human mind in integrating art and worldview.[3] This book, however, is not about these images standing for the absolute in varied forms. The question never explored in depth is, why this language? What inspires the Tantrics, whether living in palaces or strolling in cremation grounds, to encounter the transcendent in such unique imagery? Exploring the cognitive domains of Tantric symbolism, particularly analyzing metonymic structures, metaphoric expressions, and cognitive integration of various concepts into one, allows us to penetrate beneath the opaque forms and derive some understanding of this visual culture.

When outlining the salient features of art, Merlin Donald states that 'art should be regarded as a specific kind of *cognitive engineering*.'[4] While we do not need to analyze Tantric art to understand the cognitive processes at play, reading these images helps ground the creative aspect of human mind that gives rise to images. This opens up a space for advancing the argument for a cognitive study of visualization practices. Donald adds, 'art is *constructive* in nature, aimed at the deliberate refinement and elaboration of mental models and worldviews (p. 4).' This is explicit in Tantric images. With the emergence of these forms, the creative minds (whether the artists drawing or sculpting or the practitioners visualizing images) have mapped their worldviews within images and the above description of the image of Bhairava is just one example. The intriguing question is, what is the system beneath this cognitive mapping, wherein a worldview is projected onto images, or images are made to depict a specific worldview? Reading metonymic structure is an attempt to unravel these most basic principles.

Metonymic framework

In their pioneering work, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that metaphor and metonymy are not just poetic devices but are common tools of

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communication and fundamental to our process of conceptualization. Lakoff (1987) explores the cognitive mechanisms that are at play when we categorize things. When providing cognitive models in order to describe conceptual structure, he observes that our thinking process is embodied, and has imaginative character and *gestalt* properties.[5]

Metonymy pervades our cognitive activity. In this, we take one easy-to-comprehend aspect of an entity and use it to stand for something else. In the above example of Bhairava, eyes are used to describe seeing, musical instruments represent music, the shield stands for protection, or the head for individuality. There is a relation of cause-for-effect or part-for-whole in most examples given above. In metonymic thinking, certain acts are represented instead of the person doing the act, the place for the event, and so on. Lakoff explains that in metonymy, some subcategory or member or submodel is used to comprehend the category as a whole or a part used to stand for the whole (1987, 79). This something (A) standing for something else (B), as Lakoff and Johnson have pointed out, is one of the most common cognitive traits that facilitate organization of our thoughts, and is common across cultures. When something (A) stands for something else (B), A is identified as the source and B as the target. This is why metonymic structure is easier to form and is more prevalent than metaphors.[6]

Although the role of metaphoric thinking in our evolution of cognition has been extensively analyzed in recent decades, studies on metonymy have not received the same level of attention. In our case, metonymy is foundational for understanding Tantric images. Analyzing the metonymic structure of human cognition helps us ground the art of Tantric images and its culture of visualization, allowing us to identify the underlying principles. The metonymic process is essential among the cognitive tools in the sequence of forming ideas and archiving them in memory. Tantric language in general and its images in particular provide a field for understanding how the metonymic process has been used in articulating cultural archetypes and worldviews. Metonymy is even more basic than metaphor, as it requires a less complicated cognitive process. This makes metonymic thinking extremely ubiquitous. Analyzing this process in understanding Tantric images thus aims to not just understand the perplexing variety of images (which in itself is a daunting task), but also to address why such mechanisms are at play in the very first place.

The evolutionary model of human cognition explores the basis for the rise of concepts in our embodied state. This process can be explained in the following terms:

bodily experience → metonymy → metaphor → abstract concepts
(Yu in Gibbs 2008: 249)

Since both metonymy and metaphor rely on a similar cognitive mechanism, one could make a general statement that both are identical.[7] However, the relations upon which these rest, or the networks activated in giving rise to

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metonymy and metaphor are different, and therefore the role of metaphor is explored separately in the next chapter. To reiterate, metonymy is a conceptual mapping within a domain that involves a 'stands-for' relationship between the source and target domains and is used primarily for reference.[8]

Metonymy and metaphor, two among the most prominent conventional mental mechanisms, have many similarities. It has been established that all metaphoric associations are grounded in metonymy. In general, metaphor is based on similarity whereas metonymy is on contiguity, and metaphor offers alternative conceptualizations for the same phenomenon while metonymy links phenomena to each other. Following Croft, "a metonymic mapping occurs within a single domain matrix, not across domains."[9] Thus the difference between metonymy and metaphor is maintained on the ground that metonymy is a single domain mechanism whereas metaphor relies on two distinct source and target domains. In metaphor, we can have multiple mappings between two domains, whereas in the case of metonymy, we can have only one relation. In metaphor, the relation is "target is source," whereas metonymy can be characterized as "source for target." Following the structuralists, metaphor is associated with the principles of selection and substitution, whereas metonymy is linked with the principles of combination and contexture (Jakobson 1971). Metaphor and metonymy are viewed as conceptual phenomena through the perspective of cognitive semantics. Conventional metaphors and metonymies reveal an automatic connection between two conceptual structures. The metaphors and metonymies that are commonly grasped and expressed in communication are often particular manifestations of a more abstract superordinate metaphor and metonymy that are, to a large extent, culturally-specific and 'contingent' in that the source and target relation is not necessary.[10]

Due to the overlap between metaphor and metonymy, some confusion has arisen in contemporary scholarship. Some scholars have proposed two types of metaphors to resolve this problem: ones seen from the point of view of the mapping process, and those distinguished by the nature of the domains involved. When we say, "*the boy is a lion*," one aspect of lion, ferociousness, is mapped. Single-correspondence metaphors bring one aspect of the target domain into focus that is then applied to the source. Metonymy cannot be other than a single-correspondence mapping because it highlights one attribute of the target. A way to distinguish between these two is to recognize that metonymy is domain-internal and metaphor is domain-external. In some cases, the source domain is a subdomain of the target, and in others, the target domain is the subdomain of the source.

Keeping this cognitive framework in mind helps us pave the path for understanding some of the complex issues in Tantric studies, and specifically allows the unraveling of meaning embedded beneath a wide range of Tantric images. Just like other cognitive activities, the visualization of images rests on select mechanisms and the argument here is, the metonymic process is at play in both the inscription and description of the symbols under investigation.

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Varieties of Tantric language

Tantras detail the visualization of a plethora of deities. In addition, they also decipher the attributes of these deities. When these texts assign particular meaning to a weapon or gesture, or decipher *mantra* in a particular manner by assigning words to specific letters, they follow metonymic order. In order to establish this claim, this chapter examines the salient features of Tantric language, their semiotic structure, and their overarching philosophies. While some of the constituents in Tantra are uniquely distinct from the larger pan-Indian culture, there is significant overlap in these traditions, and it is not possible to read Tantric culture, their symbolism, and specifically their language, in isolation from the wider cultural context. Furthermore, since cultural categories are always in flux and shape each other, it is not possible to address any cultural phenomenon in totality without addressing others. It is commonly accepted that meaning is not frozen in time, as it evolves in assimilative and dissociative processes of cultural expression. It is therefore not the claim of this book that it will reveal once for all the hidden structures of Tantric symbolism. It is just one step towards deciphering cultural symbolism.[11]

Besides using common languages and borrowing images from the wider Indian culture, Tantras develop their own terminology and eventually a language that relies on its own semiotic system. If read without paying attention to this internal meaning system, Tantric texts are obscure, paradoxical, and extremely graphic. Traditionally speaking, they are composed for the initiates, and these texts adopt private signs or are used like personal notes. Although textualized, the dissemination process in Tantra is always dialogical, shared only to the initiate by the preceptor, and there is always something shared in person, in addition to what one can comprehend by reading texts. This private nature of Tantric language is epitomized in the conversation between Śiva and Śakti. Besides using conventional language for transmitting their knowledge, Tantras utilize gestures and images in their discourse. These additional devices of communication make Tantric language somewhat private, as the signs used here are meaningful only in the sense of creating a 'ritual dialogue' between the aspirant and the deity. This is not to argue that there is no universal domain of Tantric symbolism. While tracing the internal system of significance, this chapter points out the salient features that constitute Tantric language distinct from conventional language.

One of the most common features of Tantric language is deciphering *mantras* by establishing a correlation between particular phonemes and the particular words used to denote these phonemes. One needs to understand a complex system of relations before making sense of this reference system. Each Tantra may apply its own system of inscription, and so it is not possible to address this issue in detail. While there are even books to decipher the Tantric codes, Tantric texts often hint at this deciphering process. In order to advance the argument, a few instances are analyzed here.[12]

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Tantric texts in general divide the Sanskrit phonemes into eight groups, and citing the group number and the sequence of the phoneme in that group may be one way of inscription. For instance, if the text says, the last of the fifth and sixth, accompanied by *visarga,* this refers to *namaḥ*. In this, phonemes are replaced by numbers. The same phonemes are also linked with the elements. So, if the text says, air accompanied by fire, its intended meaning is the two phonemes /*ha*/ and /*ra*/. Although there may be multiple syllables in the group of fire, one has to choose by relying on the context to identify the specific phoneme. Tantric texts identify this process of deciphering itself as one of the layers of meaning.[13] Although the general convention is that Tantras have used this cryptic system of reference to keep the practice secret, there are many reasons to find answers beyond this. Thinking about *mantras* requires finding the relation of a word and its signified phoneme. This relation becomes complex when the aspirant is asked to also find the correlation between the *mantra*, the deity, and her *maṇḍala*, and integrate these concepts with the self-experience of the meditating subject. The metonymic 'standing-for' relation is at play in constituting these networks. Utilizing the metonymic

Figure 2.1 Bhairava

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system, the Tantric inscription process displays a complex cognitive activity essential to visualization. The deciphering process is called 'retrieval' (*uddhāra*) or restoration. Another common practice in this 'restoration' is to identify the correlating phonemes, when the limbs of the body are mentioned in a text. In Tantric practice, phonemes are projected onto the body. When an aspirant knows this system, he can understand when the text mentions select body parts, as they are in fact referring to the phonemes that are installed in those specific limbs. In this case, the limbs stand for the phonemes. Accordingly, if the text says 'left eye,' it may refer to the phoneme */ī/*.

Tantric studies are incomplete as long as the uniqueness of its language is not addressed. Metonymy is one cognitive mechanism that is applicable, not just to explain Tantric images but also to help understand the ways Tantric texts establish relations between different signs and their references. In most instances, the process of inscription is complex and requires familiarity with the Tantric worldview for decoding the symbols. For example, the seed syllable of the goddess, */hrīṃ/,* is deciphered as follows:[14]

viyad (sky)	= *h* (because the letter '*h*' is guttural, situated in the throat *cakra* that signifies the sky. The letter */h/* is thus the seed syllable for the sky.)
vītihotra	= Agni (fire) = *r* (because the letter is at the center of the *maṇipura cakra*, the center of fire). The name Vītihotra also reminds one of the son of Priyavrata and grandson of Manu. This link invokes the fire ritual conducted by him.
ī-kāra	= the letter '*ī*'
ardhendu (half moon)	= *ṃ* (because the nasal (*anusvāra*) sound is depicted in Śāradā and some other Indian scripts as a half circle that resembles the crescent moon).

There is no economy of space in deciphering one syllable by aid of four that in turn invoke various mythical connections. The deciphering process often allows the practitioner to relate the phonemes in the *mantra* with a broader Tantric cosmology.

In another example, the *mantra* of Tripurā is deciphered as follows:[15]

kāma	= *ka* (because the word *kāma* begins with the letter '*k*')
yoni	= *trikoṇa* (triangle)
	= *e* (because the letter '*e*' is written as a triangle in the Śāradā script, and a triangle represents the vulva in Indian culture)
kamalā	= *ī* (because it is written as a vertical curve that represents the serpentine force, the goddess)
vajrapāṇi	= Indra = *la* (because the syllable '*la*' is in the base *cakra*, the position of Indra)

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guhā (cave)	= *hrīṃ* (because this is the heart *mantra* and the cave refers to the heart)
hasā	= the syllables '*ha*' and '*sa*'
mātariśvan (wind)	= *ka* (Kāma and *jīva* are interlinked with the specific breath called *apāna*. So, the letter '*ka*' refers specifically to the *kandarpa-vāyu*, or the *prāṇic* energy linked with sexuality)
abhra (cloud)	= *ha* (because cloud is in the sky and *h* is the syllable of the sky)
Indra	= *la* (mentioned above)
guhā	= *hrīṃ*
sakalā	= the syllables '*sa*,' '*ka*,' and '*la*'
māyā (the magical power)	= *hrīṃ* (because this is the seed syllable of the goddess)

The process of deciphering *mantras* is only one of the unique aspects of Tantric language. Tantric deities display various gestures, and accompanying rituals rely on the articulation of gestures that carry their own meaning. There are gestures for welcoming the deity, offering the deity a seat, making the five essential offerings of fragrance, flower, incense, lamp, and food, and the gesture of farewell at the end of the ritual. Each specific mode of ritual relies on the display of gestures along with articulating *mantras*. There are gestures specific to deities, such as the gesture of *liṅga* that is displayed for Śiva or the *yoni* gesture for the goddess. There are also the gestures named after deities.[16] Ritual gestures have their own history, originating in Vedic times, and Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* is one of the earliest repositories documenting them. Tantras introduce hundreds of new gestures and use them as means to 'communicate' with deities. To display a gesture called 'welcoming' is thus welcoming the deity, and to show the gesture of offering signifies offering. Although speech is used during the process, the ritual is considered incomplete if not accompanied with the hand gestures. On some occasions, these gestures can replace *mantras* or the speech used to make the offering, and in other cases, they can also replace the substance being offered. One can thus display the cow-gesture (*dhenu-mudrā*) and expect the same ritual efficacy as is generated by offering milk.[17] Just like words are collection of phonemes and a particular sequence of phonemes expresses meaning, so also is the body the repository of meaning, and gestures are like words, expressing particular meaning from all the potentials that lie within the body of the aspirant.

To identify just a few, some gestures and their meanings follow:

vara	blessing (because it has the hand position of giving)
abhaya	protection (because it shows extending support)
tarjanī	threatening (the raised index finger)
kavaca	shield (protection because it shields the torso)
dhenu	cow gesture for purification (because cow's milk is pure)

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meru	Mount Meru for summoning (because deities reside on the mountain)
jñāna	wisdom (this is the gesture of lecturing)

The meaning of gestures is derived from both the embodied experience and cultural presuppositions. For instance, the gesture of boons (*vara*) is displayed with open palm facing down, suggesting giving. The gesture of protection, *abhaya*, is displayed with the open palm held up. The gesture of shield (*kavaca*) is displayed by covering the chest with hands crossed and fingers touching the shoulders, protecting the body. Most of the gestures, however, are culture-specific. The gesture of wisdom (*jñāna*), with thumb and forefinger touching and three fingers held erect, suggests lecturing, as knowledge is transmitted through discourse. This gesture is common to Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain masters giving lectures. Other gestures are more esoteric and hard to decipher without knowing the cultural sign system. The gesture identified as Mt. Meru has the middle fingers facing up, depicting the mountain. This relies on the centrality of Mt. Meru in Indian cosmology. The gesture of purification, identified as the 'cow gesture' (*dhenu mudrā*) imitates the cow's udder, with fingers suggesting nipples. This meaning emerges from the role of the cow in Indian culture. In these cases, it is farfetched to posit a universal meaning. The ten gestures of Tripurā displayed in the ritual worship of the ten layers of Śrī Cakra, for instance, are meaningful only in light of the texts such as *Yoginīhṛdaya*.

Besides these modes of Tantric communication, there are other languages, such as using code words the practitioners are supposed to know, as the Yoginīs they are seeking communion with might manifest and show the gestures or use the words for specific purposes. For instance:[18]

Technical terms (*Chummakā*)

signifier	signified
Sacred abode	God (Bhairava)
All-bestowing preceptor	
Mountain	practitioner
Strength-bestowing	meat
Nectar	blood
Lotus root	entrails
Moon	semen
Thread	nerves
Covering	night
Light	day
Satisfying	penis
Love-growing vagina	
Separating	weapon
Means	food
Protector	mother

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Creator	father
Sight	eye
Foundation	belly
Secret	heart
Hard	bone
Polluting	excrement
Young	goat
Means	recitation
Command	desire
Night-roamer	cat

The application of metonymy is clearly visible in this esoteric language, although it is difficult to find the exact connotation in all contexts and many of them are culture specific. Some of them are possible to understand, for instance, articulating the word 'mountain' when meaning 'practitioner.' Just like a mountain, a practitioner does not shake, or a practitioner dwells on a mountain. The word 'strengthening' refers to meat, as it nourishes the body. As blood is offered for the spirits as their rejuvenating substance, the term blood means nectar. Or, it is blood that sustains the body. Moon and semen have a resemblance in their color, and they both have bliss as a common factor. Nights metaphorically cover reality, because you can't see in the dark. Protector and creator, the attributes for mother and father, describe the cultural connotations where mother is viewed as protector and the father as creator. The substitution of sight for eyes describes the role for the instrument. 'Secret' for heart describes an internal organ as hidden. Along these lines, most of the *Chummaka* signifiers can be deciphered through the metonymic process.

In the above examples, a word or gesture (A) stands for something else (B), and the system of reference is linear. This, however, is not the case with complex Tantric symbols. Relying on different processes of suggestion, Tantras also utilize a language of cross-referentiality with multiple, layered meanings.

For instance:

ha	sky	circle	no color
ya	air	hexagon	smoky
ra	fire	triangle	red
va	water	half circle	white
la	earth	square	yellow

In this section, the letter, geometric form, and the element can refer to any of the others within the same category. In other words, one can use the syllable */ha/* and mean sky or a circle, and can also use a word 'sky' and mean a circle or the syllable */ha/*. The Tantric convention of the letters corresponding to the elements rests on this symbolic paradigm. This symbolism manifests as a consequence of a series of condensations and representations, and varied Tantric disciplines play in giving rise to this cross-domain referentiality.

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Metonymy, memory, and visualization

The Tantric ritual of visualization brings into play two different kinds of input that perform different functions. Both the cognitive mechanisms of comprehending language and identifying an image are at play when one visualizes an image. The practitioner brings to mind an image and also recites *mantras* of the corresponding deity. Ritual proceeds with making the image more and more alive, with movements assigned to the image. A cognitive link is established in this practice of processing two different inputs of speech and images. This results in the subject's transformative experience, with the subject sometimes having an altered state of consciousness (the instance of possession being commonly known[19]). Visualization does not end with a mental representation of an external image. Viewing an image of Naṭarāja, for instance, culminates in experiencing the presence of Lord Śiva in his cosmic dance. Bringing an image of Durgā to mind is witnessing the battle of the goddess with the demon Mahiṣa. The fusion of image and language in the act of visualization thus culminates with merging memory and imagination, giving the subject a vivid experience.[20] Aspirants report having a 'direct encounter' (*sākṣātkāra*) as a result of this practice.

Through the metonymic process of contiguity, images relate to one another, and to their abstract meanings. Similar to mnemonic images, these images support the process of memorization. While there may be no visible similarity between *mantras, maṇḍalas*, and the deity being visualized, they merge in rituals, as it is in the ritual that all these are brought to life.

Aspects of an image remind one of the particular roles the deity plays and therefore metonymically stand for what they suggest. Visualization, a process of relaying textual information through visual encoded system, presupposes that the subject of observation is familiar with 1) the image, 2) the myths surrounding the image, and 3) theology and cosmology governing that image. For instance, when one sees an image of Ardhanārīśvara, the blended image of Śiva and Śakti, the viewer will have multiple responses where different cognitive domains are invoked through the metonymic process of contiguity. The image arises from an embodied relationship with the divine: just like our bodies, divine bodies also represent a fusion of masculine and feminine aspects. In viewing this image where the Lord is half woman, the virility of the bull and the valor of the lion are cognized through their association with the characters Śiva and Śakti. The weapons and garments of the deities can be deciphered following the overarching myth. For instance, in the image of Ardhanārīśvara, the male side has matted hair and a flow of water is depicted that reminds one of the descent of the Ganges on Śiva's head. The non-dual nature of Śiva and Śakti, central tenet of Tantric philosophy, is vividly portrayed in this androgynous image.[21] Visualizing an image is thus bringing mythical and philosophical subtexts to the front.

Bringing an image to mind is in itself a ritual. This, however, is a small part of a broader Tantric practice. When a ritual is centered in an image, it

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activates the myth and the cosmology governing that image in the mind of the practitioner. Whether the ritual is that of bringing an image to mind and enlivening it or considering the image as a living breathing entity and making offerings accordingly, what lies beneath is a focused orientation in which memories are organized in relation to one another and brought to play through association. Metonymic process is crucial to this ritual of remembering.

The part-whole relationship, a constituent of the metonymic process, is commonly utilized in both *mantra* recitation and visualization practices. One syllable is considered to be the heart, or the central element of the *mantra*, and the *mantra* is its elaborate form. Just as the *mantra* is replaced by the image of the deity, so are the deities supplanted by their *mantras* or *maṇḍalas*. In visualization, a part of the deity or a syllable of the *mantra* stands for the body, the deity, or the entire *mantra*, and visualization practice brings this relation to the cognitive domain.

It is also worth noting that *mantras* are described as embodied. They have a heart and limbs, tuft and eyes, and are given personality. In this depiction, one structure, the *mantras* (A), is mapped onto another, the body (B). This cross-domain mapping not only gives body-like properties to *mantras*, but also *mantra*-like properties to the body in Tantric discourse.[22]

Following the principle of contiguity, images in general have parts standing for the whole. Some identify this part-whole relation with the altogether different category of synecdoche. It is not necessary for us to enter the theoretical discussion here of whether synecdoche should be treated as distinct from metonym, which is strictly based on contiguity. Suffice it to say that this cognitive process is at play in the rise of Tantric images. For instance, many Bhairava images depict only his head, representing the full-bodied deity. By associating subject or consciousness to head and the torso to the body, the head of the deity stands for Bhairava's personal identity. In some depictions, Kālī sits atop five skulls, representing five deities. The application of the *liṅga* to represent Śiva is common to both Smārta and Tantric Hinduism. This is the same case with *yoni* standing for the goddess. While part standing for the whole is vivid in these examples, there is also another layer of meaning to each of these, the source of creation. Since the divine is attributed to creating the world, *liṅga* and *yoni* as the source of creation reflect this divine role. It is explicit that there is more than one metonymic process at play in image formation. In another example, only the eyes of the deities are depicted in various shrines that stand for the deity herself. There is also a two way formation of metonymy here, as eyes not only stand for the body, they also stand for seeing, that in turn describes all-witnessing divine eyes. Besides the part-whole type relation, a common relation in these examples is that of a cause standing for its effect. When Tantric texts say, the wisdom is in the 'mouth of a teacher' (*guruvaktra*), the mouth metonymically stands for the speech. These metonyms do not just stand for something but animate what is being described, and so, the mouth of a teacher is not merely his speech, but even the saliva retains that special status. The physical parts do not just refer to something else. On

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the contrary, the corporeality in language makes what is being depicted as very much 'lived.' The field of sensation and cognition merge in this embodied language and transform experience. Any reduction, whether by the process of making this language disembodied and purely conceptual, or reduction merely to the body, therefore, fails to do justice to capturing the experience that is being addressed by bodily language.

Yet another, and a bit complicated process can be at play, when built-in metonyms are used to construct further metonyms. This process, identified as metalepsis, describes the creative process wherein the early appropriation is taken literally. For example, the sandals of the preceptor or that of the deity are visualized in the course of meditation or are depicted in shrines. With the contiguity of the user and an instrument, sandals stand for feet. There is also a visible similarity between them. And feet stand for the teacher, since students touch his feet for blessings, and visualize the feet of the guru on the crown *cakra* during their meditation. In this complex process of metonymic expression, sandals stand for the person. It is quite common in *kuṇḍalinī* meditation that the feet of the preceptor are viewed at the center of the crown *cakra.* Now, following Tantric theology, Śiva and Śakti are the primordial teachers. The feet of the preceptor thus stand for the primordial couple as well. This complex referentiality does not stop there. Since Śiva and Śakti represent the two aspects of consciousness described in terms of light (*prakāśa*) and awareness (*vimarśa*), the meaning of the feet of the preceptor extends to these two aspects.[23] Ultimately, red and white drops (*bindu*) symbolize Śiva and Śakti, and these drops simultaneously refer to the two modes of consciousness while at the same time signifying the feet of the preceptor. In this process of relating one symbol to another, multiple meanings accrete, layered on top of earlier meanings.

In this process of developing symbols, a single deity image stands for more than one aspect. Metonymically, an agent is often substituted for its action. The image of Lakṣmī is the symbol of prosperity, Kālī signifies death, Sarasvatī symbolizes wisdom, and Durgā stands for heroism. In addition to a primary designation, Kāli also stands for time, consciousness, sequence, etc. Lakṣmī also represents virtue and success, Durgā is also the feminine power, while Sarasvatī also signifies speech and sound in general. They each symbolize the absolute or the self at the same time.

In another metonymic process in developing images, the object represents the user. The weapons the deity carries, for instance the trident of Śiva, the bolt of Indra, the staff of Yama, the arrows of Kāma, often represent the deities, and can replace the deities in imagery. Likewise, a sword indicates Kālī and a book represents Sarasvatī. While there are some universal traits in the emergence of this symbolism, for instance a book symbolizing wisdom, most symbols appear culture-specific, and a shift in internal categories from within a culture alters the meaning of the early signs. The bolt of Indra is a good example. The Vedic god Indra, being the god of rain, had his thunder to stand for the heavenly power. The bolt of Bhairava does not stand for the

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same thing as it did when being carried by Indra. Vajrayāna Buddhism developed an entire set of symbols, with the bolt signifying the empty nature (*śūnyatā*). Just because these symbols do not have a fixed meaning does not make them meaningless. We know better that meaning is always in flux.

The presence of the metonymic structure is explicit in examples where abstract concepts are linked to forms. In this exchange between form and meaning, metonymy may have played a role in the processes of both encoding and decoding. In this context, how a book 'becomes' a deity, or how particular emotions assume a body, are topics for further discussion. How a text transforms into a deity in South Asian culture is one clear example for explaining both the visual culture and the cognitive mechanism at play in giving rise to the symbolic system. For instance, four Vedas are found in iconic forms. *Prajñāpāramitā,* a Mahāyāna Buddhist text, is one of the earliest texts to transform into a goddess, assuming anthropomorphic form. Even the text *Bhagavadgītā* is visualized as a deity. When the texts are viewed as embodied, the way they are depicted explains the beliefs surrounding the text, its magical powers, and the central teachings of the text. When Vedas are visualized, the particular animal or bird faces suggest the peculiar sounds of articulating the *mantras.* The example of Prajñāpāramitā is also explicit. From the *Prajñāpāramitā*, a text, Prajñā manifests as an embodied deity representing wisdom. The image of Prajñā keeps changing, as does her significance among believers. While there is no actual battle for the goddess to fight, she carries a sword and bolt, signifying elimination of the ego and ignorance.[24] Even though the text and its meaning are established, the image representing the text remains in flux, giving rise to new meanings. Through the metonymic process, text and deity inform each other, and the aspirant borrows meaning from one domain and transfers it to the next with the aid of the same cognitive mechanism. Often times, this process gives rise to new meanings and the old ones are layered beneath. Just like one text can be considered an archive for accreted meanings, so can be an image. As the imagery evolves, the image of the deity blends with other deity images and complex forms emerge. As one can see, an understanding of even one of the most basic among the cognitive mechanisms gives new ways to decipher texts and images and explore the exchange between literary and visual cultures. In this transformation from text to image, Prajñā transforms into a piece of art, and just as Donald (in Turner 2006: 4) suggests while addressing arts in general, the deity image goes through deliberate refinement and elaboration.[25]

Metonymic significance is present, not just in the case of weapons or gestures but also for the seat of the deity or the background against which the image is visualized. Following general metonymic guidelines, the location for a specific event represents the event itself. The cremation ground, for instance, represents death. A grove suggests an amorous play. A cave, for instance, suggests a meditation place or solitude. Since a yogin renounces a city life that stands for *saṃsāra* and goes and lives in a cave, a cave thus suggests the rejection of *saṃsāra.* A chain of metonymic processes is activated to reach this meaning.

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The full moon, a dark night, sunrise, etc., in the same way, allude to specific events that occur at these times. Beyond a universal meaning of darkness and light, sunrise and sunset stand for the specific rites, or different *prāṇic* states in the yogic body.

Another crucial process of metonymy is the effect suggesting the cause. When the red eyes of Bhairava are depicted to indicate wrath, the redness in eyes are the corporeal effects of going through anger. Similarly, the sunken belly of Bhadrakālī indicates her hunger. When Kālī is depicted sitting atop a corpse, the corpse is representing death metonymically. A complex cause-effect relation can be established between a snake, its poison, and the resulting death; the moon, its nectar, and immortality as its effect; cremation ground, the act of cremating dead bodies, death itself, and transiency; and so on. Donald (in Turner 2006: 7) argues that "art is always aimed at a *cognitive outcome*." This certainly is the case with Tantric images, where the

Figure 2.2 Kālī

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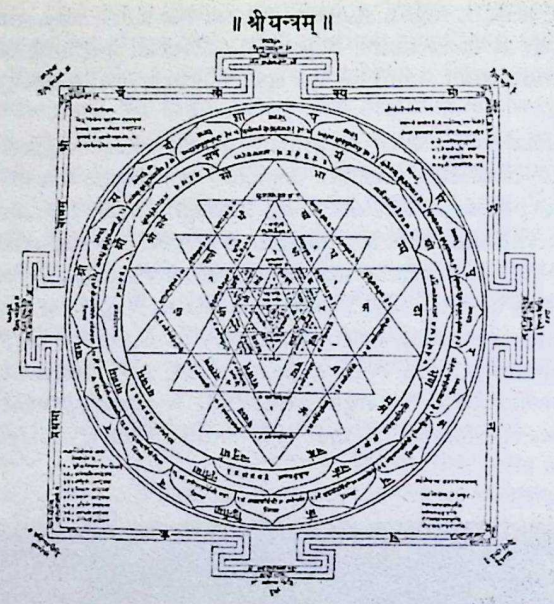

Figure 2.3 Śrī Cakra with letters

Figure 2.4 Bhagavadgītā as a deity

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practitioner's gaze encompasses the worldviews and complex relations that underlie the visualization of images.

Texts and images interplay to create meaning. In this process, textual polysemy can cause different meanings in visualization. For instance, the term *kara* means both "hand" and celestial rays.[26] Deities, by definition the luminous ones (*deva*), generate rays from their body. Tantric texts describe the peripheral deities as the rays (*raśmi*) of the central deity in a *maṇḍala*.[27] These deities can also be represented as the hands of the primary deity, as those who sit in the periphery are the emanations of the deity at the center. When a deity is carrying a weapon identified as *śakti*, she is also holding "power," another meaning of the term. When Śiva carries a *triśūla* or trident, he is also holding three forms of suffering under his control. Evident in all these examples is the role metonymy plays in the processes of both inscribing and deciphering the images.

Select examples below demonstrate how metonymy is at play in images:

Object	metonymic application
Eye	seeing, realization, gaze
Tongue	flames, fire
Snake	poison, death, the underworld
Hair	personal identity, group identity
Third eye	rage, aversion, and also its reversal: wisdom, all-witnessing gaze
Cremation ground	death, the meeting point of life and the afterlife (relying on the Hindu cremation grounds found alongside a confluence)
Vermilion powder	passion, the embodiment of passion
Fire	wisdom (because it incinerates *karma*)
Fire	consciousness (dispels ignorance that is darkness)
Arrow	time (the arrow represents the swiftness of time)
Arrow	passion (passionate desire gives way to a tender pain)
Sword	wisdom (it cuts through ignorance)
Sword	victory (it kills enemies)
Mouth	speech, *mantra*, the transmission of the particular lineage. The five faces of Śiva stand for the transmission of five distinct Tantric lineages
Head	Identity, subject
Hand	action
Feet	motion, movement: transformation, blessings from the teacher, the teacher himself
Beads	counting, repetition of *mantra, mantra* power, *siddhis*
Lotus	heart, different emotions

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Lotus	wisdom. The blooming of a lotus stands for the rise of the sun (effect for cause); the sun stands for dispelling darkness; darkness stands for ignorance
Lotus	vulva
Rivers	channels in the body, the flow of energy
Vase	saturation, fullness, perfection (*siddhi*)
Vase	immortality (as it contains the nectar)
Corpse	death
Cave	secrecy, solitude
Grove	amorous play

In these depictions, the objects the deities carry can stand for both the deities themselves and the particular role assigned for those objects. A trident can stand for Śiva, and a lotus, the goddess Lakṣmī. These weapons, at the same time, also convey their particular meaning. Therefore, arrows made of flowers stand for both eros and the god of eros, Kāmadeva. The image of Tripurā shown carrying these arrows portrays that the goddess has embraced Kāma, and this is why she is also called Kāmeśvarī. Instruments stand for action: the eyes stand for seeing, or a mirror stands for counter-image. The mirror of Pārvatī thus stands for her nature to mirror Śiva which gives rise to plurality.

Hardly any other art form can make such a strong case for the hermeneutics of visual culture as that of Tantric images. These are traditionally deciphered like texts. However, not all rules that apply to texts apply here, and there are some salient aspects in deciphering these images that cannot be applied in reading texts. For instance, metaphoric expression is predominant in texts while metonymy underlies the assumptions made in developing images and incorporating them in the practice of visualization.

A cognitive approach to religious symbolism is explanatory in nature. It is vivid in the above examples that understanding the mechanism of metonymy allows readers or viewers to gain insights that are hard to acquire thorough other means. In this sense, the approach is hermeneutic. A literal reading of Tantric texts and images has remained problematic, and this approach, demonstrated above, is also contrary to the belief system or the culture that is being examined. The mainstream hermeneutic approaches to reading Tantric culture have failed to address the nuanced domains of inscribing and deciphering meaning in images. The argument made here is that the cognitive approach gives a new direction and finds meaning beyond the literal.

In summary, for as many ways that metonymic relations can be found in language, we can demonstrate that many examples from Tantric art. The metonymic relation of cause and effect is the most explicit and well elucidated. The case for the relation of creator and what is created is vivid in the portrayal of Kālī to depict destruction. The case of user and instrument is even more pronounced, as instruments such as a lute or trident are found replacing their user, Sarasvatī or Śiva. The container/contained type of metonymic

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relation is explicit in the skull cup the deity carries, indicating ambrosia. A place is depicted to suggest the events that occur in that place, and time is shown to indicate the particular events recommended for those times. For example, the cremation ground depicts death, the grove behind Tripurā suggests amorous play, water suggests vitality, and the sunrise or sunset, full moon or new moon indicate the rituals prescribed for those times. The metonymic device of using a sign to indicate what is being signified is vivid in the use of the particular objects the deities carry. The concrete/abstract relation is more pronounced when we relate images to texts, where the abstract concepts from the texts are portrayed in images. The case of Prajñā is vivid, as the abstract concept of wisdom becomes manifest in the form of the deity herself. Recognizing metonymic structure thus aids in unravelling the most basic and most common processes that Tantric art utilizes.

Although the focus here has been on images, the metonymic structure does not apply to only the visualization practice. This is just one among many cognitive transactions that are culturally framed. Evident in this case study is that the system of meaning is governed by cultural parameters. Rituals or gift exchange follow the same metonymic patterns. What is universal in these culture-specific meanings is the cognitive mechanism that all cultures use in creating symbols and myths, and performing rituals and exchanging gifts. Returning to the study of images, while one image may metonymically suggest a single concept, it is generally the case that a single deity image embodies complex meanings. This process is aided by a vibrant exchange between the textual and visual cultures. Common to these different processes is the act of meaning-making, or a conscious effort to depict something that stands for something else. Rather than inventing new meaning, cognitive tools assist us in the hermeneutic effort to uncover how the texts and traditions have encoded and deciphered cultural symbolism.

Notes

1 This is a brief summary of the *Bhairavānukaraṇastava* of Kṣemarāja. For discussion, see Timalsina 2013a.

2 Kṣemarāja's project of interpreting the image of Bhairava in BAS also relates to interpreting the body. For symbolism in general and for gestures, see Crooke 1919; Brown 1921; Coomaraswamy 1913–14; Gonda 1969, 1972; Coomaraswamy and Gopālakrishnāyya 1970; Bosch 1960; Saunders 1957, 1960; Ikegami 1971; and Jones 1983.

3 For a general introduction to religious symbolism, see Wagner 1986; Sperber 1975; and Toren 1984: 260–68.

4 Donald in Turner 2006: 4.

5 For the scope of metonyms, see Ruwet 1975: 371–88; Blank 1999: 169–91. For metonymy and cognition, see Blank 1999: 169–91; Croft 1993: 335–70; Croft 2006a: 335–70; Croft 2006b: 317–26; Díez Velasco 2001: 47–63; Dirven 1993: 1–28; and Dirven 2002: 75–111.

6 For discussion on metonymy, metaphor, and cognition, see Turner and Fauconnier 2000; Barcelona 2000; Radden 2000; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibañez 2000, 2002, 2004;

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Gibbs 1994; Croft 1993; Dirven 1993; Lakoff and Turner 1989; and Lakoff 1987. For the scope of metonymy, see Panther 2006: 147–86; Panther and Radden 1999; Panther and Thornburg 1999: 337–57; Panther and Thornburg 2003a; Panther and Thornburg 2003b: 1–20; Papafragau 1996: 169–95; Peirsman and Geeraerts 2006: 269–316; Radden and Kövecses 1999: 17–59; Ruiz de Mendoza and Francisco 1997a: 201–95; Ruiz de Mendoza and Francisco 1998: 197–208; Ruiz de Mendoza and Francisco 2000: 109–32; and Ruiz de Mendoza and Franciso 2005: 91–120.

7 For defining metaphors, see Croft 1993: 335–70. For the scope of metaphors, see Aarts and Calbert 1979; Black 1962: 25–47; Lakoff 1993: 202–51; Sacks 1979; Fauconnier and Turner 2008: 53–66; Fauconnier and Turner 2008: 53–66. For comparing metonymy and metaphor, see Dirven and Pörings 2003; Feyaerts 2000: 149–69; Goossens 1990: 323–40; Goossens 1995: 159–74; Jakobson 1971 [1956]: 90–96; Song 1997; and Radden 2000: 93–108.

8 Lakoff and Turner 1989: 103. Some scholars have found this position problematic. For discussion, see Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, F.J. and Pérez Hernández, L. 2001: 321–57.

9 See Croft 2002: 177.

10 Velasco-Sacristan 2010: 64–96.

11 For Indian symbolism in general, see Harsch 1957; Jung 1955; Kirfel 1959a, 1959b; Sharma 1956; and Sperber 1975. For the limits of symbolic interpretation, see Jarvie 1976.

12 *Mantrābhidhānakoṣa* is one such text in mind that extensively deals with Tantric code language. *Mahākālasaṃhitā* provides an extensive detail of code words and the published version includes in its appendix their reference. For discussion on *mantra* language, see Modi 1932; Bolle 1959; Gonda 1963; Alper 1991; Findley 1991: 15–47; Staal 1991: 48–95; Wheelock 1991: 96–122; Coward 1991: 165–76; Oberhammer 1991: 204–23; and Padoux 1991: 295–318. For magical language, see Izutsu 1956.

13 For six-fold meaning of *mantras*, see Timalsina 2005.

14 *viyadīkārasaṃyuktaṃ vītihotrasamanvitam* |.
ardhendulasitaṃ devyā bījaṃ sarvārthasādhakam || *Devyatharvaśīrṣa* 18.

15 *kāmo yoniḥ kamalā vajrapāṇir guhā hasā mātariśvābhram indraḥ* | *punar guhā sakalā māyayā ca purūcyaiṣā viśvamātādividyoṃ* || *Devyatharvaśīrṣa* 14.

16 For the images of some gestures, see *Ajitamahātantra*, vol. 5, pages 80–97.

17 Some texts outline hundreds of gestures, and others, such as *Yoginīhṛdaya* describe the primary gestures.

18 *Svacchandatantra*, Chapter 15.

19 For a select works on possession, see Smith 2006; and Walsh 1989, 1995.

20 The application of imagination here and elsewhere in this paper is close to *kalpanā* or *bhāvanā* in Sanskrit, and the imperatives, such as *kaplayet*, *bhāvayet*, etc. For the significance of imagination in the practice of visualization, see Timalsina 2013; Isabelle Ratie 'Imagination in *Pratyabhijñā*'.

21 For the symbolism of the divine feminine in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, see Dikshitar 1942; Wayman 1962; Shaw 2005; Hawley 1982; Kinsley 1988, 1997; and Narayanan 1982.

22 For *mantras* as embodied, see Timalsina 2010. For visualization of the body for its purification, see Flood 2001. For the body as a metaphor, see Flood 2006: 74–76.

23 For discussion on *kuṇḍalinī*, see Silburn 1988 and Avalon 1974. For the analysis of the concept of *vimarśa*, see Skora 2007a, 2007b, 2009.

24 For detail, see Bhattacharyya 1978: 37–67.

25 For instance, the Cambodian image of the Prajñā goddess comes with 11 heads and 22 arms (Bhattacharyya 1978: 60).

26 For the multiple meanings of *kara*, see *Medinīkoṣa* (123.12).

27 For the history of *maṇḍala*, see Haarh 1958; Pott 1966; Meister 1979; and Staal 1983.

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3 Metaphor, embodiment, and Tantric images

Defining the categories

Metaphor in tantric discourse

All cultures and languages use metaphors. Contemporary cognitive scientists have established that metaphoric thinking is the basis of human cognitive activity. Although we have come to the point where the line between the literal and metaphoric has been blurred, and the scientific or objective is no longer viewed as dissociated from the metaphoric, we have yet to affect the course of cultural studies. The mainstream cultural studies today primarily relies on the literal, aims to construct a linear meaning, aspires to read cultures as a linear progression, and often times, reduces the cultural elements to socio-political categories. This reductive tendency has its own consequences. This chapter concerns reading metaphors in Tantric literature. Nothing can highlight this case better than the study of metaphors in Tantric culture. Tantric texts rarely use literal language. Their philosophical categories are metaphoric, their rituals are made in the processes of packing and unpacking metaphors, and whenever possible, Tantric practitioners choose the metaphoric at the cost of the literal. Their visualization practices, *mantras*, *maṇḍalas*, and deity images are all metaphoric, and due to a lack of understanding of the greater significance of metaphoric thinking in Tantric culture, contemporary studies of Tantra have gravely suffered. This chapter aims to only highlight the need for altering the discourse and emphasizing the importance of metaphoric language in addressing Tantric culture, both visual and literal.

Metaphor, embodiment, and culture[1]

Broadly speaking, in the case of metonymy, one entity *stands for* another, whereas in the case of metaphors, one entity is *viewed as* another. Despite this seeming clarity of definition, there is nonetheless a significant overlap between metaphor and metonymy. Both are highly pervasive in language and are

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non-literal. Both play a significant role in the evolution of language, particularly when the meaning of words shifts over the course of time. With metaphor, we understand some aspects of an entity in a new light, as if that part is magnified. Metonyms refer to something else, substituting one entity for the other. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 6) argue that "metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words," and claim that "human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical." Metaphors, along these lines, are in our conceptual system. Therefore when we conceptualize something metaphorically, it is natural that some aspects are highlighted and the others are automatically subordinated.

Lakoff and Johnson distinguish among metaphors, placing them in different groups based on their nature. *Structural metaphors* provide structure to one concept based on another concept. *Orientational metaphors,* on the other hand, orient subjects by spatializing concepts. For instance, we view being happy in terms of going up. *Ontological metaphors* address concepts whereby one part of an entity is picked out as a discrete entity, and when placed in this category, the metaphor refers to our experiences as entities. One may, for instance, say, I am *a little rusty* today. It will be evident in the following pages that engaging metaphor theory is immensely helpful in revealing the layers of meaning embedded in Tantric culture, particularly visualization practices.

Recent studies on metaphor have also pointed out their embodied nature. Lakoff and Johnson argue that all primary metaphors develop by being grounded on our embodied experience. Others have even argued that synesthesia and metaphor are similar cognitive processes.[2] It is also being increasingly accepted that even the most abstract concepts are based on sensory-motor images. These findings have pointed out that metaphoric thinking is crucial to our sensory perception, language comprehension, and reasoning. Having said this, one should not overlook the scope of culture in the construction of metaphors.[3] Rather than expressing new conceptual categories, metaphors thus express preexisting concepts that are predominantly shaped by culture. The inherent tension between whether metaphors are embodied and thus universal, or whether metaphors are culturally shaped is not difficult to resolve: for both, the answer is affirmative. Embodied experience and cultural constructs do not necessarily preclude each other. It will be clear as we proceed in the following pages that the way we conceptualize our body is vastly shaped by culture. And, of course, cultural experiences are the embodied experiences acted out collectively.

It is thus explicit that the use of metonymic and metaphoric thinking is universally found, albeit the way they are constructed can be determined by culture. The scope of this chapter is Tantric visual culture. It has been discussed earlier that images are crucial to this culture and the ritual of visualization, a central constituent of Tantric practice that relies on creating and manipulating images, including animation. The focus here is to explore the extent to which metaphoric thinking has shaped this practice and has given rise to

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images.[4] While doing so, this study also demonstrates the extent of embodied conceptualization in the formation of Tantric cultural constructs.

Metaphor and cultural hermeneutics

There is an apparent tension in defining the scope of this discussion. On one hand, I am advocating embodiment as central to metaphoric thinking, while on the other, I am arguing in favor of cultural constructivism and rejecting universalization. This tension can be resolved by addressing how metaphors are treated in the home culture, in this case, that of classical Sanskrit, and argue for a validity of metaphor theory by keeping culture as one of the factors in determining metaphoric thinking. While an acceptance of the universality of metaphoric and metonymic thinking is a recent phenomenon, theorizing metaphors and applying them in discourse is not new. The objective of grounding metaphors in classical Sanskrit culture aims to widen the scope of this discourse. Engaging Sanskrit esthetic theory for addressing Tantric visualization also stems from a recognition that cultural presuppositions and oftentimes the very processes of conceptualization are broadly determined by culture. As Goddard (2004: 1212) points out, we "need to avoid terminological ethnocentrism in the metalanguage of description and analysis, and this means, among other things, that the term 'metaphor' itself cannot be taken for granted." While this makes a strong case for engaging Sanskrit metaphor theory, it is not possible to entirely address this issue in a single chapter in the broader context of analyzing visualization. The objective here is only to suggest some salient features and give some examples to advance the argument that an exploration of classical Sanskrit culture can enhance our understanding of non-literal thinking, and as we broadly engage visual culture, it will be easier to address various cultural metaphors because the ways metaphors are construed in classical Sanskrit culture are not identical to those utilized in contemporary Western culture.

While 'primary meaning' (*abhidhā*) has maintained its privileged position in philosophical discourse, it is not the case that metaphoric expression remained only within the domain of literature in classical Sanskrit. Both philosophical and literary texts suggest that the scope of metaphoric language is much wider than has been acknowledged. To begin with, those philosophers who considered the 'power' (*śakti*) of language to describe reality by words expressing universals and not particulars, maintain that particulars are known through indication (*lakṣaṇā*).[5] In order to expand the scope of indication, Advaita Vedāntins claim that language cannot directly describe the absolute and words are capable of only indicating it.[6] If we use the term 'metaphor' to describe all that is non-literal, the application of the above position is that reality can be described only metaphorically, or the 'thing-in-itself' is only metaphorically known. In other words, language relates to our concepts, and the reality that has been captured or reflected in our concepts is known

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metaphorically. Now the discussion is not restricted to literary language or language in general, but to our cognitive processes.

Metonymy is primarily addressed in Sanskrit literature when discussing indication (*lakṣaṇā*). Following the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* (SD) of Viśvanātha, there are eighty varieties of 'indication.'[7] Several of these varieties are unique to Sanskrit expression, supporting the argument that metaphoric expression is culturally grounded. The sophistication in addressing indication, as one can see in SD, helps expand the scope of non-literal language and eventually address the way we conceptualize reality. This makes a case for engaging classical Sanskrit philosophical traditions and esthetic theories while addressing cognitive issues, particularly those related to comprehending language.

A few examples cited in SD to explain indication are:

'The white runs.'	('White' stands for the white horse.)
'Kaliṅga is courageous.'	(Kaliṅga, a place, refers to a person who lives there.)
'Spears enter.'	('Spear' refers to the person carrying the spear.)
'The prince laughs.'	(The term prince refers to someone with princely qualities.)

These are examples of different varieties of indication, and following SD, each of these can be used as metonym or metaphor, depending upon context, or with or without the use of the noun terms. If '*these* spears enter' is the sentence, the term 'spear' does not refer to the spear-bearers, but describes their qualities, as being sharp, for instance. When the subject is not given, the same sentence is used metonymically.

As seen above, the distinction between metonymy and metaphor is porous and often overlapping. Furthermore, when translated into another language, the same expression is hard to preserve. One often cited example in Sanskrit for 'indication' is 'a hamlet in the river' (*gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*). The Pāṇinian suffix *ṅi* (*–yām*) can have multiple denominators in English, such as on, by, at, in, around, and so the English speaker can choose any of these to be precise and no indication will be required. Another example in Sanskrit is 'butter is life' (*āyur vai ghṛtaṃ*). One needs to ground cultural presupposition that butter is considered in Āyurveda as nourishing, as our contemporary understanding of 'fat' for butter cannot explain this metaphor. In essence, while the Sanskrit philosophers maintained a difference between primary and secondary meanings, they did not limit the scope of secondary meaning to poetic expression alone.

Sanskrit discourse on *alaṅkāra* is complex.[8] In support of the claim that engaging Sanskrit literature can bring to light hitherto unaddressed nuances of human cognitive mechanisms, and how this is relevant for the contemporary study of metaphors, I will offer some examples. Generally understood as figures of speech, *alaṅkāras* play a central role in Sanskrit poetics, and the literary theories addressing these tropes provide a universal approach to secondary speech, transcending the parameters of poetic language. Also noteworthy is

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that these devices are meticulously defined by classical esthetes, and are oftentimes understood differently. We cannot translate the key terms, such as similarity (*sādṛśya*) or comparison (*upamāna*) across disciplines, as what these terms mean in literature is not the same as how they are understood in the different philosophical schools. For instance, similarity (*sādṛśya*) stands as one of the categories of logic in Mīmāṃsā and comparison (*upamāna*) as one of the means of comprehension. In poetics, both are considered *alaṅkāras*. The examples given in the following paragraphs are thus only to initiate a dialogue for a broader discourse.[9]

To demonstrate how engaging the analysis of *alaṅkāra* can enrich the contemporary discourse of metaphor and cognition, the examples of '*upamā*,' '*rūpaka*' '*samāsokti*,' and '*arthānaranyāsa*,' will suffice. *Upamā*, in general, is comparison. Viśvanātha identifies fifty-four primary varieties of comparison, while acknowledging its infinite internal variants.[10] In the case of 'comparison,' Sanskrit esthetes identify the domains of source and target as *āropita* (source = S) and *āropya* (target = T). In an example, 'the boy is a lion,' particularities such as fierceness, boldness, etc. found in the lion (S) are mapped onto the boy (T). In the example 'lotus eyes' (*kamala-nayanā*), not only are the shape and character of the woman's eyes being praised (T), but also other properties such as visually pleasing, are borrowed from the lotus (S).

Gerow (1971: 239) translates *rūpaka* as a literary device having the form of metaphoric identification. He defines it as "a figure in which the subject of comparison is identified with its object by a specific process of grammatical subordination."[11] Following a classical definition, "in the instances where the substrate [or the] target (T) of comparison is always colored by the image of the object with which T is compared with S, that is identified as *rūpaka*."[12] If the imagery from the source, e.g., hair, is superimposed on the target, e.g., trees, and trees are described as having hair, this will be *rūpaka*. Ballantyne and Mitra translate this as metaphor.[13] Following SD, this consists of "the superimposition of a fancied character upon an object where the target has not been concealed" (SD 10.28ab).

In the case of *samāsokti*, "the suggestion of the other situation is subordinated to the requirements of clever characterization ..." (Gerow 1971: 317). In this metaphor, the character of one is ascribed to another, based on action, sex, or attribute.[14] Just to show how metaphors can be culturally grounded, a common example for this metaphor is, "the sun does not serve the dusk without conquering the entire world."[15] What is lost in translation is the term for the sun in Sanskrit, '*ravi*' is masculine in gender, and *sandhyā*, the term for dusk, is feminine. In the metaphoric world, the sunset is envisioned as coupling. The traversing of the sun from its rise to its setting is metaphorically described as a conquest.

Arthāntaranyāsa, or introduction of another matter, is "a figure in which a proposition or remark is justified or substantiated by the adjunction of a relevant moral or rationale; apodixis" (Gerow 1971: 118). In the statement, "we have landed on the moon: nothing is impossible," the first sentence is

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used to justify the second. This brief discussion is only to make a case for the further study of *alaṅkāras* in light of contemporary metaphor theories. The objective here is comprehending Tantric visual culture with the aid of literary theories, metaphor in particular, and so I would like to limit this discussion.

Returning to the contemporary discourse on metaphor, Lakoff explains that "image-schemas" define the source domain and these are metaphorically mapped onto the target domain.[16] Following Lakoff (1993: 215), "metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain." Corrollaries follow from this definition. The systematic mapping can be extended to the construction of new metaphors. An asymmetry between S and T is necessary for metaphors to function. In the above example, the boy is compared to a lion, and not the reverse. In the world of linguistic metaphors, the relation between source and target domains is unidirectional.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that both the classical Sanskrit exegetes and contemporary metaphor theorists such as Lakoff and Johnson have sought a wider domain for metonyms and metaphors than considering them as mere poetic devices. Rather than identifying metonymic or metaphoric mode of consciousness as a cognitive construct subordinate to the literal, it may be the case that what we consider 'real' or 'thing-in-itself' is cognized metaphorically. At least, following the Advaitins, the 'literal' cannot describe the 'thing-in-itself.'[17] This is to say that metaphors map the reality that literal language has failed to describe. If this argument is extended, we are closer to reality when cognizing metaphorically. Realizing this strength of metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 55) assert that "metaphors can have the power to define reality. They do this through a coherent network of entailments that highlight some features of reality and hide others." Deviating from the traditional Western understanding of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson have established that our conceptual system itself is largely metaphorical, or that we largely cognize entities in relation, knowing one thing in terms of another.[18]

In Tantric visualization, an aspirant activates both the image and the text in the mind during practice. Alternatively, the subject plays with the words of the text describing the deity and its surroundings while bringing the image to mind. The text, while using metaphors to describe aspects of the deity, becomes the speech-image with which the practitioner identifies himself. When an image is brought forth in the mental space, metaphor becomes a device to bridge the gap between the subjective and the objective.

The following example from a manual for visualization practice demonstrates the scope of metaphor:

> 'Your right eye gives rise to the day, since it is of the nature of the sun. Your left [eye] creates night, since it is [the moon,] the mistress of the

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night. Your third eye, with the glow of a slightly opened golden lotus, gives rise to the intermediate time between day and night.'[19]

What has been suggested in the above example, the transcendence of the goddess over time, is described metaphorically. The recitation of the text serves to bring this imagery to the mental space during the course of visualization. This process of metaphoric thinking is not unique to Tantras though, as one can see the similar process in popular Hinduism where the deity image is described.

Ideology, metaphor, and Tantric visualization

One can research poetic fancy, the use of various literary tropes, and the poetic devices in the Vedas. Scholars have identified some of the cognitive mechanisms that are at play in performing Vedic rituals, or rituals in general.[20] What this present study emphasizes is the unprecedented transfer of ritual concepts found in the Vedas and Upaniṣads into subsequent contemplative practice, where the physical ritual activity is reproduced conceptually. That the deities themselves became metonyms for abstract concepts is vivid in the way the Vedic deities such as Agni or Indra are represented in this shifted cultural paradigm. This is not to say that this metonymic process was absent in early Vedic imagination, as the deities Vṛtra, Aditi or Uṣas all appear representing abstract concepts. What we see in the Upaniṣads is this process being more complex, while adding new significance to old imagery alongside the emergence of new sets of concepts. For instance, the early imagery of Indra that stood for various elements such as valor, protection, glory, order, etc., or Agni that stood for light and for that matter wisdom, cosmic order, virtue etc. were reintroduced as stand-ins for particular abstract concepts. In this new paradigm, early ritual metaphors transform to contemplative metaphors, shifting the previous, signified meaning to a new signifier. For instance, ten *prāṇas* and the self, collectively making eleven, are equated with eleven Rudras. Likewise, the twelve Ādityas are identified as the twelve months of a year, because they carry (*ādadānāḥ*) the whole world as they proceed through time (BĀU 3.9.1–5). In this process, metaphors merge into metonymic thinking, with the identification of Indra with thunder and the thunder with a thunderbolt, a weapon of Indra (BĀU 3.9.6).

That metaphoric thinking has been crucial in transforming early sets of symbols to the new ones is vivid in the Upaniṣadic example where the cosmos is compared with the sacrificial horse (BĀU 1.1). In this passage, the dawn is identified as the head of the horse, the sun his eyes, wind his breath, fire his mouth, and the year as his soul. In this broad analogy, the heavenly vault is described as his back, the sphere of the sky is the belly, the horse's flanks stand for the earth, and his ribs designate the intermediary space. The seasons are compared to his limbs, the lunar months and fortnights are his joints, the days and nights are compared to his legs, the constellations are represented by

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his bones, ether is found in his flesh, sand is the undigested food in his belly, rivers are his anus, and mountains are the place between his liver and heart. Herbs and plants are compared to his mane, the rising sun is the front part of his body, and the setting sun as the hind part below his navel. The horse's yawn stands for lightning, his movement represents thunder, his urine corresponds to rain, and his neighing symbolizes all speech. In this, the early symbolism (correlation of the body-parts of the sacrificial animal with different deities, as found in the early Brāhmaṇa texts) is linked with the new symbolism (the omnipresence of the Brahman). Transforming early symbols (which were metonymically construed) to the new ones has been possible through the complex cognitive process that is metaphoric in nature. While early symbolism rests on rituals, new sets of metaphors are embedded in contemplative practice, and both of these are rooted on the particular worldviews. Since these are culturally construed and change over time, it is not possible to decipher the metaphors without acknowledging the presuppositions intrinsic to the source culture. The cultural transformation that revolutionized earlier beliefs and practices and gave rise to new contemplative structures touches its zenith in Tantric visualization. An historical awareness is thus warranted for unraveling the conceptual layers that accrete over time.

Lackoff and Johnson (1980: 3) argue that our ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphoric in nature. Myth making, the transformation of reality in images, and the projection of additional properties and concealment of other aspects, all function through metaphoric thinking. Just like a spoken language, visual metaphors depict inner cognitive structures. This universalization, however, falls short when ignoring the fact that metaphoric thinking is culturally shaped, and while metaphoric thinking is universal, the ways metaphors are construed vary with each culture, and without factoring in the internal cultural presuppositions, the bare knowledge of the structure cannot assist in deciphering meaning. Consider the image of Kālī, for example. It has been discussed in the previous chapter how the metonymic process has played a role in shaping visualization. Metaphoric thinking delineates the link between two systems: the ritual domain of Tantric visualization and the Trika, Krama, and Mahārtha philosophies of Tantras that consider Kālī as the supreme divinity. In these non-dual philosophies, since consciousness is universal to all the cognitive processes, it is considered a singular reality and its pristine form is equated with Kālī. By borrowing the monistic worldview, the deity is now identified with consciousness. The imagery of Kālī, in this paradigm, becomes the effulgent consciousness manifesting in all conceptual modalities, and the terms used to describe consciousness, such as *samvid*, or *cid* become synonymous with the goddess. Visualization, in this paradigm, becomes a contemplative act of bringing the imagery to mind while remembering the central tenets of Tantric philosophy. The dark body of the goddess wearing heads and hands and the cremation ground as her residence, in this transformed paradigm, becomes symbolic and correlates to constituents of the Tantric worldview. Finding these correlations, however, rests on relating

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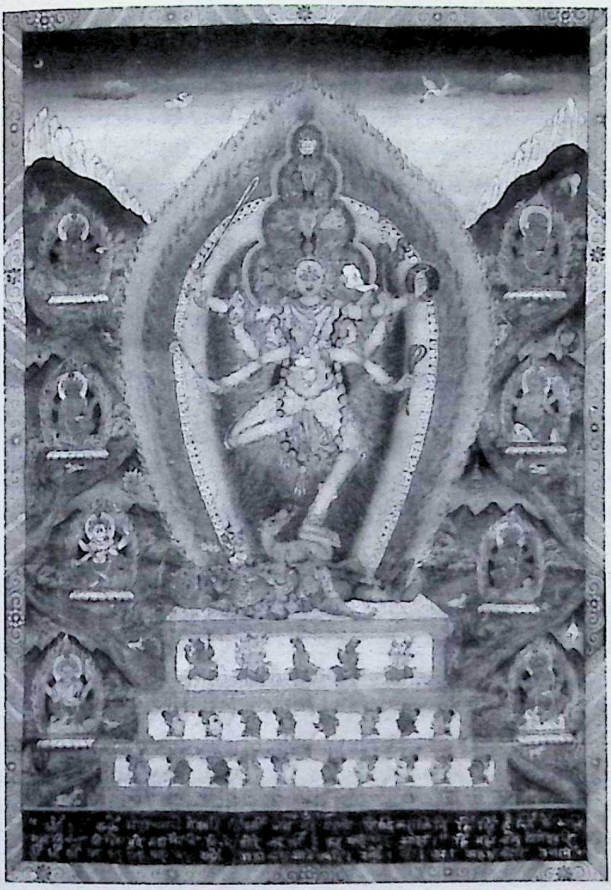

Figure 3.1 Guhyakālī

the two systems, and metaphoric thinking plays a crucial role in establishing links between the different domains. A few examples from a text centered around Kālī that grounds Tantric Krama and Mahārtha philosophies suffice to support this claim:

1. The text under consideration is *Cidgaganacandrikā* (CGC) or *Moonlight in the Sky of Consciousness.* As the very title suggests, consciousness, just like the sky, is all-pervasive. At the same time, when consciousness is equated with Kālī, it also identifies Kālī's omnipresence. The text metaphorically identifies itself as moonlight, indicating its soothing nature. What is also suggested here is the equation of the dark night with Kālī and the author's premise to cast some light on her nature. This light does not contradict the night or Kālī though, as it is not the sunlight.

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2. The text correlates the trunk of Gaṇeśa with the syllable *Om* (CGC 1) and relates the Sanskrit phonemes to the body of Gaṇeśa. The text compares transmigration in the world with wildfire and identifies the text with the rejuvenating waters of the moon (CGC 3). This invokes the Hindu belief that the moon contains ambrosia, and to highlight its abundance, the author uses the term '*abdhi*' or ocean.
3. Some of the metaphors found in CGC that rest on cultural presuppositions include: consciousness is the eyes (CGC 4); heart is the cave (CGC 5); eyes are the powers; consciousness is the ocean (CGC 7); rays are the net (CGC 10); the body of Kālī is the *sattva guṇa* (CGC 16); Kālī depicts *tamas* (CGC 19); the goddess is the full moon by manifesting her full form, and she is also the new moon by concealing the world within herself (CGC 21); Kālī consumes time (CGC 22); the goddess is pure consciousness (CGC 23); the goddess destroys limitations in the heart of the aspirant (CGC 25); having awareness of the goddess helps in destroying other concepts (CGC 26).

As every single verse in the text is replete with metaphors, the objective here is not to list them all, but to suggest that the textual body cannot be dissociated from metaphors. Or, what is conveyed by the text is not exclusive of metaphors. Studying these texts has been problematic, not just that they are metaphorically laden, but also that the dominant trend of contemporary scholarship sidelines these texts as sophistry and not essential to understanding the concepts. This textual hermeneutics stems from the understanding that our epistemic framework is non-metaphoric, or that metaphors are subordinate to recognizing reality. As a consequence, texts like CGC that shape the practice of visualization are bracketed from a wider cultural discourse.[21]

Tantric visualization primarily utilizes orientational metaphors. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 14) explain, these metaphors relate to spatial orientation, such as up-down, in-out, front-back, deep-shallow, or central and peripheral. Tantric *maṇḍalas* do not just assemble deities. They use these orientational metaphors in organization to describe one concept (represented by a deity) in relation to another concept, demonstrated by its orientation to the central deity – above, below, or peripheral. In *maṇḍalas*, these deities sit or stand on top of one another. In the visualization of Siddhilakṣmī, for instance, Bhairava sits atop a Vetāla and the goddess sits atop Bhairava. In order to demonstrate the particular 'family' of the deity, they are depicted wearing a crown with the mark of a specific deity. By riding on Bhairava, the goddess subdues the masculine principle. With her five faces, the goddess looks in all directions, demonstrating her omniscience and omnipresence. Her victory over time and death is portrayed by her riding Bhairava (representing time) who is sitting atop a Vetāla (depicting death). Every single image is laden with metaphors and Tantric visualization encourages the establishment of metaphoric correlates. Visualization, along these lines, activates the same cognitive process that is operative in metonymic and metaphoric thinking.

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Orientational metaphors are more explicit in the depiction of cosmic planes, where the hellish worlds are shown in the lower part of the body (or the canvas), and the heavenly planes are depicted above, with the visible world in the middle. The navel of the body stands for the center. The structure of five deities carrying the goddess, common to Mahāvidyā depictions, describes her transcendence over what the male deities represent. Visualization practices encourage the subjects to be creative in finding the correlates, and the worldviews determine the ways these metaphors are deciphered. Non-dual Tantras utilize these images to describe their ontological and epistemological categories, and metaphors are the means to establish this relationship. While the sources are different in these metaphors, the target is the same: the self and the deity, both addressed with the term consciousness (*cid*), supersede the lower structures, the body, or the manifest world. Placing one deity on top of another, thus, functions on one hand to subordinate the deities depicted in the lower strata, while on the other hand, it serves to demonstrate the transcendent categories, like Sadāśiva being the seat for Śiva and Śakti.[22]

The metaphor of center and periphery, essential to all *maṇḍalas*, depicts multiple things at the same time: the prominence of the central deity over the peripheral ones, the centrality of consciousness in the body, the body as an extension of consciousness, the cosmos as the emanation of pure consciousness, etc. Visualization helps map the different domains of text and image and the cognitive process of metaphor is at its center.

Multiple cognitive processes are simultaneously activated in visualization. Personification, one of the factors of ontological metaphors, is sometimes found when the weapons of a deity emanate as deities themselves, or when the limb of a deity manifests as a deity of its own. As has been mentioned earlier, Varuṇa, Uṣas or Aditi from the Vedic times embody a sophisticated process of personification. In popular Hinduism, the goddess Durgā carries various weapons that represent different divinities. Just like in the case of a *maṇḍala*, the central deity Durgā presides over peripheral deities in this depiction. The only difference is that the arms (or the weapons) of Durgā replace the peripheral deities. In this cognitive process of personification, individual deities can be compared to systems, objects, or metaphors. For instance, Purāṇic texts compare the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu (Varāha) with the Vedic sacrifice. In this depiction, the four feet of Varāha represent the Vedas; the front legs portray the act of ritual offering; his mouth depicts the fire pit; his tongue stands for the fire; his hair portrays the sacred grass *darbha;* and his eyes represent day and night.[23] Although this example is not from a Tantric text, it directly explains visualization: this is not about freezing the mind on a single object, in this case a boar, but to establish a correlation between the different domains.

In the cultural transition from Vedic to Tantric or in the fluid Tantric culture that varies at different times, both the source and target of early metaphors have changed. Bakhtin's concept of sedimentation aptly explains

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this process, helping us ground the argument that emergent structures carry nuances from the early structures, and the analysis of metaphor helps us fathom the cognitive mechanisms at play. The process of sedimentation, he argues, follows the chain of communicative situations. Social construction of reality, in his understanding, rests on sedimentation of particular actions on one hand and emergence of new actions on the other. The tension between emergence and sedimentation, or the process of centralization and decentralization, following Bakhtin, underlies reproduction and modification of social realities.[24] In our context, both deity image and *maṇḍala* are constantly evolving, and the way these two structures interact demonstrates the emergence of new concepts with replacement or sedimentation of earlier ones. Just as one can see the contemplative philosophies replacing early metaphors of Vedic rituals, similar processes transform early Kaula rituals into the new Tantric paradigm grounded on the monistic philosophy of pure consciousness.

Sanderson observes this shift in meaning from early Kāpālika to the subsequent Kaula and Krama concepts in the following lines:

> "The yoginīs became the deities of his senses (*karaṇeśvarīs*), reveling in his sensation. In intense pleasure, this reveling completely clouds his internal awareness: he becomes their plaything or victim (*paśu*). However, when in the same pleasure, the desiring ego is suspended, then the outer sources of sensation lose their gross otherness. They shine *within* cognition as its aesthetic form. The Yoginīs of senses relish this offering of "nectar" and gratified thereby they converge and fuse with the *Kaula*'s inner transcendental identity as the Kuleśvara [Lord of the Cosmic Body], the Bhairava in the radiant "sky" of enlightened consciousness."
>
> (Sanderson 1988: 680)

Tantric practice of visualization is not just about bringing images and their meaning to the practitioner's mental space, but is also a creative cognitive process of refining meaning. When asked, Tantric subjects do not decipher the meaning of the *maṇḍala* they have been visualizing in identical terms. All, however, agree that it has meaning and that needs to be deciphered following the system. My exchange with Tantric practitioners over two decades leads me to conclude that while meaning is viewed as essential to practice, it is not considered frozen, or limited to texts or teachers, but subjects are allowed to be creative in discovering meaning. While retrieval of memory is crucial in tracing meaning according to the texts, active imagination is required in the creative act of engaging with meaning. This is where metaphoric thinking comes to play a role. But this is just one aspect of the story. These images are activated with overpowering emotions: the experience of love, heroism, anger, or disgust are just a few among the emotions that subjects cultivate during

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visualization. This aspect of visualization where emotion is essential is the subject of a different chapter. I am only pointing out that visualization is a sophisticated process of engaging memory and imagination while activating emotions. And, the cognitive domain of this process is predominantly shaped by metaphors.

In order to demonstrate how Tantric philosophy is primarily shaped by metaphoric thinking, I will outline a few examples here:

1) The very name for the discipline is metaphoric:
The term Tantra from the root √*tan,* with the meaning, 'to weave' or 'to expand' describes its synthetic and aphoristic nature. Pāśupatas, who have accepted Paśupati as their central deity, borrow the deity name from the 'animals' (*paśu*), and the 'owner' (*pati*). The term '*naya,*' used to describe the discipline, is metaphoric, as its literal meaning is 'path.' A set of Tantric texts is called Yāmala, or a 'couple.'

2) The highest category in the non-dual Tantras, pure consciousness (*saṃvid*), is portrayed metaphorically:
Following Trika Tantrism, pure consciousness (*saṃvid*, *cid*) is the absolute reality, equated with Śiva. It is considered autonomous, or endowed with powers that give rise to the world. All subjective and objective realities are grounded in this pure consciousness and this is the highest state of yogic realization. The prominent metaphors for consciousness follow.

Consciousness is fluid.
This is described as the 'ocean of consciousness' (*cidudadhi*). Just like the ocean has ripples, consciousness manifests as concepts. Just as water does not have its own inherent form and takes the shape of the container, so also does conscious assume the form of any object that it encounters. This fluidity of consciousness is explicitly detailed in philosophical texts such as *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, where perception is defined as the flow of consciousness similar to the flow of water, and the transformation of consciousness into manifold objects is compared to the way water takes the shape of a field with four corners and so on.[25]

Consciousness is fire.
Relying on this imagery, the highest category is described as 'the fire of consciousness' (*cidagni/saṃvidagni/jñānāgni*). Just like consciousness objectifies, and in that sense consumes, all that exists, so does fire. Just like fire burns objects, so also does consciousness burn mental constructs.

Consciousness is the void.
This metaphor is described in terms of the 'sky of consciousness' (*cidgagana/cidākāśa*).[26] Just like empty space permeates all that exists, so does consciousness. Just like space does not have its own form, so is consciousness devoid of inherent shape.

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These metaphors allow conceptualization of something that lacks its own intrinsic form. One of the central constituents of the Trika philosophy, consciousness manifests in all external forms while intrinsically remaining formless, provides a framework for both constructing and comprehending the metaphors. The primary ideological metaphor, *consciousness is fluid*, helps us understand the application of the terminology such as *ūrmi* (wave), and the terms *sphurattā* (throbbing), *vimarśa* (reflection or touching), *saṅghaṭṭa* (banging togather), all describe the vibrancy of consciousness. The concepts that consciousness is devoid of forms and it embodies power to manifest itself through different acts are consistent in all these metaphoric expressions.[27]

3) The binary metaphors: in the Trika paradigm, the absolute manifests itself in the form of Śiva and Śakti.[28] As an image, it is depicted as Ardhanārī śvara, where the right half of the body is portrayed as the male and the left half, female. The primary metaphors used to describe this union of the binaries in the absolute are:

Śiva is *puruṣa* and Śakti is *prakṛti*.

One of the central metaphors in Tantric literature, this is borrowed from the Sāṅkhya system (while changing its meaning).[29] The original application of these terms in Sāṅkhya is itself metaphoric: consciousness is identified by the masculine term *puruṣa,* and the feminine *prakṛti* is used to describe three primordial tendencies of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Sāṅkhya uses this set metaphorically, borrowing terms from common language to describe the philosophical categories. Tantras use these terms to replace the early paradigm and describe an absolute harmony of two principles in the state of realization. The terms for copulation become the terms to describe the mystical state, as the liberating experience is considered to be unifying the opposites.

Śiva is light (*prakāśa*) and
Śakti is the reflexive awareness (*vimarśa*) [lit. touch].[30]

These metaphors rest again on a number of presuppositions. First, Śiva is equated with consciousness, and consciousness is metaphorically mapped with light, as they both reveal entities. The application of *vimarśa* to describe Śakti rests on the philosophy that consciousness is a singular reality having two modes of illuminating objects and reflexively grasping itself while illuminating. The very term is a metaphoric application, for the literal use of *vimarśa* as 'touch' is captured in this reflexive mode. The binary description of consciousness as light and reflexivity (*prakāśa/ vimarśa*) explains this very phenomenon of consciousness reaching out to entities and simultaneously being self-aware. Consciousness, like a lamp, does not simply illuminate what is out there; it also reveals itself. This

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mirroring is where the self or awareness rests creatively in each and every mode of cognition.

Male is white, female is red.

Often times, Śiva is depicted as white and the goddess Pārvatī, red. In *maṇḍalas*, white and red are proportionally distributed. These metaphors stem from the bodily substances of semen and blood.

4) Triadic metaphors:
The triad of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas:*
One of the most prominent categories to introduce classical Indian philosophy, these three qualities/tendencies (*guṇas*) are described as: *sattva* is white; *rajas* is red; and *tamas* is dark. This identification of one set of constructs with the other rests on considering *sattva* as full of light and viewing light as white; seeing *rajas* as dynamic, linking it with motion; and relating *tamas* with inertia or darkness. When describing tendencies, these are not portraying colors. The association of *rajas* with dynamism corresponds to the somatic condition of the flow of blood. *Tamas* suggests the darkness of the unconscious.

The deities are in a triad.
By borrowing the earlier categories of the *guṇas*, and assuming that Śakti is *prakṛti*, the set of goddesses (Kālī, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvatī, or Parā, Parāparā and Aparā) is viewed in a triad. The system of Trika invokes the deities in a triad, and also analyzes other categories in a set of three. One of the early triadic structures is that of *pati*, *paśu* and *pāśa* that describes the God, sentient beings, and bondage.

Self-experience is triadic.
Expanding upon the above-described earlier concepts, Trika philosophers explain self-experience in triadic form. The term for the first person pronoun, *aham* (or I), following Abhinavagupta, is an amalgam of three phones: a + h + m, where the first stands for the initial vowel, the second, the last of the consonants, and the final letter, the nasal sound or the letter *m*. The early two in this (*a+h*) describe the primordial couple, Śiva and Śakti, and the letter *m* stands for individuated consciousness. For Abhinava, the term *aham* becomes a category to describe both the ontological and epistemic realities.[31]

5) Process metaphors:
Creation is initiated with pulsation (*spanda*) in transcendent consciousness. This metaphor rests on our conceptualization of motion, particularly the flow of air. This metaphor also describes consciousness as embodied, since the term *spanda* also means the pulsation of the heart.[32]

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'Creation is the waves (*ūrmi*) of consciousness.'
This metaphor stems from the earlier one, 'consciousness is fluid.'

'Recognition of the absolute is a penetration or entry (*samāveśa*).'
This metaphor rests on our common experience of entering home or an enclosure.

'The highest esoteric experience is "putting together" (*samādhi*).'
This metaphor rests on our imagination that the mind is some substance that can be put into something and sealed. There are various other metaphors to describe the process of realizing the absolute: *bodha* or awakening, *jāgṛti* or rise/awakening etc.

6) Metaphors to describe the categories:

Time is a spinning wheel. Time is an arrow.
Both these metaphors are used in classical texts, where one views time as cyclical and the next indicates the flow of time in a single direction. Both are conceptualized based on our familiarity with something totally different from time.

Water is a circle; fire is a triangle.
There are geometric designs associated with elements, and this rests on our perception. We see a drop as circular and assume water to be circular. We see the tip of flames suggesting the form of a triangle.

Water is va; fire is ra.
Tantras also associate phones with elements. This association rests on the physical effort or the soothing or fiery experiences the phonemes give when articulated. This analogy corresponds to the identification made with the corporeal centers, the phonemes visualized there, and the elements associated with those centers.

Since an image mirrors the cosmos, time and space are framed within it. This framing is facilitated by the cognitive process of metaphoric thinking. Time, generally depicted through action, is spatialized in images. Since arms depict action which in turn represents time, they metaphorically stand for temporality. Following the metaphor, "*time is space*,"[33] Kālī sits atop Mahākāla, the Lord of time, who in turn presides over five deities that depict the cosmic functions of creation, sustenance, reabsorption, concealment, and grace. Yet another metaphor plays in the sleeping posture of Sadāśiva or Mahākāla, which describes the concept that "*death is sleep.*" In the vertical arrangement of deities from the bottom to the top, deities in the lower rank govern the lower realms and are subject to a shorter span of time. Tantrics maintain that this vertical structure portrays a gradual rise of consciousness from the finite individuality to the divine consciousness that collectively experiences all as the self. Thus the deities "*ride*" on time, and "*time is a vehicle.*"

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In essence, all the philosophical discourse, including the expression of the esoteric experience, rest on metaphors. As one can see, these metaphors are culturally grounded and therefore they cannot be reduced to mere bodily experience or universalized. This, however, is one side of the story. The embodied aspect of metaphor is widely found in images, particularly in Tantric visualization.

Body, metaphor, and visualization

The metaphoric body

A central aspect in the relation between culture, language, and metaphoric thinking is the body and its configurations that are crucial to not only describe the categories but also to explain the esoteric experience. To begin with, the reflexive aspect of consciousness is described in terms of 'touch' (*vimarśa*). One's being in the highest state of absorption is described as 'penetration' (*vedha*). The embodied states of waking and sleeping describe stages of mystical experience as well as the process of *kuṇḍalinī*: *jāgaraṇa* or *utthāna* (waking), *śayana* (sleeping), and so on. Using serpentine imagery to describe an inactive energy is in itself a metaphor. A frequent metaphor for yogic absorption is *nidrā*, or *yoganidrā*, in the sense that a yogin is unaware of the phenomenal reality when he is 'asleep' in his yogic absorption, or, when his consciousness is directed inward.

This emphasis on metaphoric expression can sometimes be perplexing. In the above examples, the yogic absorption is described by both the terms of 'awakening' and a 'yogic slumber.' Experiencing commonsense reality can be a metaphoric 'slumber' as well as 'waking' to everyday experience. Rather than trying to resolve paradoxes and find a single term, these texts celebrate this complexity.

Body-parts, along the same lines, are used to describe various categories and aspects of the mystical experience. *Liṅga* and *yoni* are two major terms that depict the primordial couple and describe the esoteric experience that is compared with sexual union.[34] These metaphors, however, do not merely depict body-parts. While stemming from embodied experience, they stand for higher categories and a simplistic reduction to corporeality fails to acknowledge this complexity. For example, eyes stand for the witnessing aspect of the self, the divine omniscience, healing energy, and so on. Often times, phenomenal reality and the body are reduced to the eyes, as if perception embodies both what can be seen and the perceiving subject. Along these lines, corporeal gestures and the relation of one body to another correspond to various categories.

The heart is the most significant among the corporeal metaphors. It describes multiple things: consciousness resting in itself, the state of realization, the intrinsically pulsating nature of consciousness that gives rise to phenomenality, and the central *mantra* of the deity. The esoteric experience of

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self-realization is described as penetrating or entering into the heart. The absolute reality is described in terms of the heart due to the constantly pulsating nature of consciousness (*citi*).

Body is often compared to the cosmos, and particularly to the earth, with the flesh and the bones metaphorically standing for mountains, and the nerves with flowing blood compared with rivers. Central glands, in this depiction, are mapped with ponds, and the head represents Kailāsa, or the top of the mountain. Embodied states such as arousal are often compared with fire, and the victory of Śiva over desire is depicted as the immolation of Kāma. This also metaphorically describes the tension between yogic and sexual energies (portrayed as heat). This metaphor of heat stems from the corporeal experience of arousal and the burning sensation of anger.

Creation and the dissolution of the world are described in terms of the opening (*unmeṣa*) and closing (*nimeṣa*) of the eyelids. The terms *carvaṇa* or *grāsa*, meaning chewing and swallowing, describe the acts of Kālī devouring the manifest reality into her essential nature of pure consciousness. The absolute or Śiva is given faces (*vaktra*) for revealing the texts (Āgamas). Embodiment has thus remained the language to describe the mystical state, the realization of the self as Śiva.

Contemporary studies on human cognition have much to say on these issues. Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 555) maintain that metaphors originate from our sensory-motor experiences.[35] The discussion above demonstrates the centrality of embodied experience in Tantric metaphors. However, not all metaphors can be reduced to somatic experiences, as a wide variety of metaphors rely on factors such as culture, language, and their worldviews. Constructivists' arguments are noteworthy in this regard. Proudfoot argues that feeling or emotion is interpretive of sensation in response to environmental stimuli and so it is not just the raw data that is grasped in sense-object contact.[36] How we interpret our experience, including our embodied experiences, along these lines, is a matter of interpretation. Metaphors, in this regard, are not just a mere product of our experience, but rather instrumental to the way we view ourselves and engage the world, as what we feel is not always the biochemical reaction occurring within our body; but rather, what "we are taught to feel in response to the events of our lives."[37] These arguments are congruent with those of the cognitive linguists who maintain that many of our metaphors integrate bodily and cultural experiences.[38] And, this is also what Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 57) maintain: "*every* experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions ... Cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes are not a conceptual overlay which we may or may not place upon experience as we choose. It would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience our 'world' in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself."

In Tantric visualization, the body is used as a template to describe reality. Categories are mapped within the body, vividly apparent in the ritual of *nyāsa*

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or installation, or in visualizing the body as the site for all the categories. In this process, some metaphors give rise to others. For instance, the masculine and feminine metaphors function differently in Sāṅkhya and Tantric systems, and Tantras derive multiple metaphors based on the binary. In so doing, as Richard Brown (1977: 125) argues, root metaphors are meta-cognitive schemata that are taken for granted and thus frame thinking in a wide area of cultural activity over many years. In this process, a single site, for example the body, accretes multiple metaphors (sometimes even contradictory ones). Visualization practices not only apply metaphors, they also decompress them by providing explanation.

The body of imagination

Merleau-Ponty maintains that our understanding of sensation or the way we analyze sensation can be compared to the way we understand perception.[39] He explains that perception is a behavior affected by the body and not by consciousness. This contrasts with the position that consciousness constitutes perception from discrete instances of sensation. This 'body' that affects perception, for him, is not the flesh, or the body as the piece of the physical world, rather the body as lived, a living body. He distinguishes the objective body with the "other knowledge which we have of it, in virtue of its always being with us. And of the fact that we are our body" (PP, 206). He argues, our "bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning" (PP, 46). In this context, he describes the other body as a "habitual body" which is not identical to the flesh. This habitual body rests on our past experiences. Ichikawa, deriving the seminal concept from Merleau-Ponty, proposes two categories of perceiving the body: subject body and object body.[40] In both these descriptions, our experience of the body-self rests on our earlier experiences, and what we consider as our body is not just the flesh but a system of possibilities. These insights from a phenomenological analysis of the body are helpful in unpacking some of the metaphors in Tantric texts and visualization practices.

The act of visualization constitutes the habitual body. The subjects, by constantly viewing their body in a particular way, train their consciousness to respond to certain stimuli accordingly. Neuroplasticity can explain the somatic aspect of some of these mechanisms. The effect of visualization among the practicing subjects can be compared with the roles that culture and language play in constituting collective identity and social behavior. The difference is, subjects, while constructing a new identity (involving their body-self), often deconstruct cultural presuppositions, resulting in an open space within which consciousness follows new habit patterns, or experiences the absence of such patterns. Since there is a primacy of imagination in this process of reconstructing or deconstructing the body, I am identifying this as the body of imagination.

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The imagery that is frequently repeated in Tantric visualization involves the body as identical to the cosmos or as the distilled mass of consciousness. What the subject experiences through this practice is not merely the '*body as flesh*.' Just like the bodily identity in dreams, meditating subjects can manipulate their bodily awareness. Subjects, accordingly, can identify themselves with something that is not given in the flesh. The argument that the subject's awareness of himself is dynamic can be exemplified in varied forms of possession (*samāveśa* or *āveśa*), where the subject with a total control over his induced altered state describes his self-experience while maintaining an altered personality. These instances also highlight that the subject's awareness of himself is constructed in relation to his surroundings. The way one subject identifies himself or feels the extension of his 'self' in the other, varies in relation to the other subject's response. One can consider oneself representing the entire group or a nation. Tantrics utilize this fluidity in personal experience and claim that self-experience can be transformed to the Śiva-experience that embodies the totality. This transformation rests both on creative imagination and the cognitive process of metaphoric thinking. Accordingly, the transparency and plasticity imposed on the body-self does not arise from the flesh itself but from the imagined body. This visualized body nonetheless affects its surroundings, shaping bodily awareness which cannot be limited to the flesh alone. In this sense, the visualized body resembles the habitual body of Merleau-Ponty, as through everyday meditation, the yogin constructs new habit patterns that reorient his sensation and perception, including his experience of the body.[41]

Now the issue is, how does metaphoric thinking play a role in constituting the visualized or imagined body? A few core practices in Tantric visualization make this explicit:

1) The ritual of 'purifying the elements' (*bhūtaśuddhi*). In this visualization process, subjects envision in different centers within their body the five elements, and with articulation of certain syllables, they purify these elements. The process may include distillation of the gross elements to the subtle, and re-manifestation of the gross elements from the subtle. So the syllables *la, va, ra, ya,* and *ha,* are viewed as the syllables to represent earth, water, fire, air, and the sky, and starting from earth, the viewer imagines his body transforming to more and more subtle elements, eventually to the sky. He re-maps the body by externalizing it from the sky to earth. The concept of 'cleaning' is metaphoric, as it is borrowed from physical cleanliness. The substitution of the elements with the phonemes rests on ideological metaphors.[42]
2) In one practice, certain syllables are visualized in the toe that ignites fire (of course, mentally). This fire engulfs the body. The subject than views a regeneration of the body, with the flow of 'elixir' (another visualization). Borrowed from actual cremation rituals, this 'mental fire' has the same

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effect, albeit to the visualized body. The fire is described as 'the fire of time and death' (*kālāgni*).

3) The practice of *nyāsa* or 'installation' relates to visualizing different syllables and *mantras* in different corporeal limbs. In this re-mapping of the body, the subject views his body as comprised of fifty Sanskrit phonemes, certain syllables from the *mantras* being articulated, different *mantras* of the system, different deities in a *maṇḍala*, and so on. In these complex practices, all the Tantric categories, geographic planes, cosmic bodies of the planets and lunar mansions, etc. are mentally 'installed' or envisioned within the body. In so doing, the practitioner is creating a visualized body. In these practices, corporeality is a metaphor to depict elements and to define self-experience. The body, in this visualization, transforms into a *maṇḍala*, a geometric design, allowing the subject to identify his body with what the *maṇḍala* represents.

The visualized body, while resting on imagination, is not totally dissociated from the phenomenal body. The sensations of burning and soothing, for instance, are borrowed from the corporeal experience of encountering fire and water. The colors red and dark are associated with arousal and anger. The depiction of the goddess Tripurā as 'The Mistress of Passion' (Kāmeśvarī) or the identification of Kālī as a ferocious dark goddess rests on various metaphors borrowed from embodied experiences. Since we feel heat in the acute state of anger, the deities of the 'wrath' (*krodha*) family are visualized within a circle of fire. There is also a fiery element in sexual arousal. Śiva emits the fire of rage burning down Kāma, the god of desire. The play of metaphors in two types of fire and the subordination of passion with anger is explicit in this narrative. Visual signals of anger, such as bulging eyes and a wide mouth (Forceville 2005: 75–76), are consistently shown in the depiction of Bhairava. The deities that represent *tamas* or *moha* (delusion) carry a cup filled with liquor and display the somatic experience of being drunk. Loss of bodily awareness is also vivid in their nudity. Along the same lines, various deities are either depicted with animal faces or are riding particular animals. Since specific emotions are linked with certain animals or birds, the non-human figures depicted in a *maṇḍala* are equally crucial in deciphering an image.

The hand gestures, displayed during the Tantric practice, is one of the most complex examples of borrowing symbolism from different domains. While some gestures are simple to understand: such as the gesture of 'cow' (*dhenu*) with two palms and fingers depicting cow's udder, or the Mount Meru gesture, with fingers suggesting the mountain peaks, most gestures rest on the Tantric understanding of the body, of the channels and the association of different fingers with different elements, and so on. The gestures of boons (*vara*), protection (*abhaya*), or displaying a threat (*tarjanī*) rest on universal physical responses. Others display certain aspects of what is being represented, such as the gestures of *yoni*, trident, or *liṅga*. Most, however, are meaningful

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only within the specific Tantric system and are used both metonymically and metaphorically.

The description of gestures found in texts such as *Cakrasaṃvara* (CS) and *Yoginīhṛdaya* (YH) clearly articulate the differences between somatic and cultural meanings. The hand gestures for hunger, thirst, etc. as found in CS (20.2–13) are rooted on somatic responses and can be universalized. Specific configurations such as *yoni* are based on the correspondence of particular fingers with particular energies, and this relation is entirely culture-sensitive, as the meaning derived cannot be universalized. Following YH, two right and left hands correspond to Śiva and Śakti and the four energies associated with Śiva – Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, Raudrī, Ambikā – are identified with four right-hand fingers, and the four energies of desire (*icchā*), cognition (*jñāna*), action (*kriyā*), and the resting mode (*śāntā*), correspond to the goddess and are linked with the left-hand fingers.[43] These two masculine and feminine energies are also linked with the two letters, |*a*| and |*h*|, representing the vowels and consonants. Accordingly, these two letters also describe self-awareness or *aham*, in addition to being an acronym for the first vowel and the last consonant of the Sanskrit syllables that collectively describe the totality of phonemes as well as the world.[44] In the case of the particular gestures described above, while the inscription of these gestures, or their prescription in rituals come first in the *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava*, YH focuses on unpacking their significance. Construction of specific language meaningful only in a certain ritual context and unpacking that meaning are thus crucial to Tantric visualization. This system of creating signs and assigning meaning rests on the cognitive process of metaphoric thinking.

Tantric practice, in this light, is a process of engineering our bodily experience. Complex cultural and philosophical metaphors are at play in articulating particular emotions, conveying certain concepts, or 'engaging' in dialogue with the deity which rests primarily in the imaginative domain. Not only does this practice remap the habitual body, it also helps reshape somatic experiences. The body, in these practices, becomes the field of meaning, and stemming from the basic corporeal states, the visualized body expands the scope of somatic experience.

Conclusion

The above discussion supports the conclusion that culture plays a central role in metaphoric thinking. Language, as discussed earlier, does not just represent reality and convey experience, it also constitutes reality and shapes our experience. Due to this greater role given to language and culture, ideological metaphors are essential in visualization practices. Not only are the worldviews mapped in visualization, these also shape metaphoric thinking. This makes cultural awareness crucial to understanding culturally grounded metaphors that arise from our concepts.[45] For instance, *bitter opinion* or *digest the ideas,* come from the conceptual metaphor, *ideas are food.*[46] Fauconnier and Turner point out that "conceptual products are never the result of a single mapping"

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and that "cultures build networks over [a] long period of time that get transmitted over generations" (Gibbs 2008: 53). This is why, while metaphoric thinking is universal, the way metaphors are constructed and expressed are embedded within the culture. The brief discussion found above of classical Sanskrit *alaṅkāra* theory points to the same conclusion. These conclusions, however, do not contradict the fundamental position of Lakoff and Johnson that metaphoric thinking is shaped by our embodied experience and the cognitive process is itself metaphoric.

The universality of metaphors is explicit when examining philosophical texts that convey their categories through metaphoric language. While some of these metaphors are easy to decipher and rooted on our embodied experiences, the sophisticated Tantric visualization practices are hard to decipher without an awareness of Tantric philosophy. Also crucial is the role that emotions play in constituting reality and metaphoric thinking. Tantric visualization is one example of how the distinctive cognitive processes of recollection, attention, imagination, and emotional thinking are channeled through a single stream of consciousness. Through this, practitioners constitute a separate body, the body of imagination. This imagined body functions just as Merleau-Ponty proposes for the role of the habitual body, and as a consequence, embodied experiences become reshaped. In other words, not just what we perceive but also what we experience relies on cultural input, and metaphors both map and shape our experiences.

The above discussion places both consciousness and the body in the cultural platform. Meaning, as has been argued earlier, is sedimented (as Bakhtin would say), and tracing metaphors that describe concepts is one certain way to identify the earlier concepts that have been reframed in the shifting cultural discourse. Often times, apparently literal texts need to be interpreted metaphorically. This is just one example of how meaning is sedimented. The literal becomes metaphorical; multiple metaphors cluster together, giving rise to new concepts through conceptual integration; and new metaphors evolve or new meanings are discovered for the same metaphors. These arguments are congruent with those of Velasco-Sacristán (2010: 64–96), who argues that ideological metaphors demonstrate the conceptual interaction between metaphor and metonymy. These processes are essential to transform the subject's experience, as demonstrated in constituting the *mantra*-body, or the body created through visualization by installing various *mantras* in different limbs of the body.

Fauconnier and Turner (2000) note that, although metaphor invokes both the source and target domain, it does not describe either of them. Although literal analysis proves to be very fruitful in examining conceptual metaphors, composite metaphors and metaphor + metonymic expressions cannot be literally explained. The Upaniṣadic example where the ritual sacrifice is transformed into contemplative practice, or the visualization of deity images, all rest on a composite process with a greater exchange of metonymy and metaphors.

These arguments also relate to proprioception, our perception of our own embodiment. Our perception of our own body is not fixed, and the way we

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experience our embodied states can be determined by varied factors. What about our altered self-experience, or our habitual body that is based on previous experiences? These questions suggest the direction for further studies in human cognition primarily in the cultural context, and the need for engaging Tantric practices in a wider discourse on human cognition.

Experiences are lived, with the body at the center of our perception. This centrality of experience, however, is not just to surrender to the body and its instincts, as the subject's freedom is vivid in emotionally grasping objects, metaphorically shifting meaning from one to another, or transforming one's subjective experience or one's embodied experiences. Visualization practices make a case for a fluidity among our experience, perception of our surroundings, and our own embodiment. In this sense, I can agree with Ricour (1977) in his contention that truth is inseparable from the expression of lived experience. Metaphoric expression, in this light, is not a mere substitution for a literal one; instead, it is the unfolding of an aspect of experience as it is processed in cognition.

The role imagination plays in constituting reality can be found, not just in fancies or dreams, but in every perceptual mode. In the absence of imagination, creativity as intrinsic to consciousness would be sidelined. Our experiences are made rich or complete through imagination, and the power of imagination is exploited in visualization techniques that direct subjects to not just creatively imagine something (A) as something else (B), but also shift subjective experiences by altering personal experience (X) to the divine one (Y). The cognitive process of metaphoric thinking is essential in this transaction with meaning imported from one domain to the other.

It is through this power of imagination, or the power of creativity, that the Tantric subject constitutes new experiences affecting not only his environment but also his own body. Visualization is a particularly complicated cognitive process that rests on multiple faculties of perception, memory, imagination, and so on. When actively perceiving *maṇḍalas,* the practitioner visualizes the deities seated in different parts of his body, with their corresponding *mantras* being invoked. This rests on memorization, as what is recalled in this process are the passages that have been memorized earlier. This practice can also evoke myths and creative animation of the deity image that involves mental offering to the deity. Since the cognitive process is complex, multiple sources are activated at the same time, projecting meaning to a single target. As a consequence, the subject's visualization transforms to, or is felt as, direct experience, with subjects identifying this experience as 'a direct encounter' (*sākṣātkāra*). Since multiple sources are represented with different meanings at the same time, visualized images in this process become a 'multimodal metaphor' where "target, source, and/or mappable features are represented or suggested by at least two different sign systems" (Gibbs 2008: 463). Just as metaphors compress multiple domains, visualization techniques compress multiple concepts in a single domain. The next section addresses this issue.

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Notes

1 For conceptual metaphor and culture, see Barcelona 2000b: 31–58; Emanatian 1999: 205–18; Holland and Quinn 1987; Kövecses 1999: 167–88; Kövecses 2002, 2005, 2006; Quinn 1991: 56–93. For a general discussion on metaphor and meaning, see Johnson 1981; Ricour 1977; and Sapir 1977. For introduction to the Indian theory of meaning, see Kunjuni Raja 1969. On metonomy and metaphor in Sanskrit poetics, see also Gerow 2013: 324–31.

2 For discussions, see Slingerland 2008: 156–62.

3 For discussion, see Quinn 1991.

4 For studies on image and metaphor, see see Miller 1979: 202–50; Forceville 2002: 1–14; Forceville 2006: 379–402; Fuertes-Olivera *et al.* 2006: 347–78.

5 For instance, Dharmarāja gives an alternative position regarding the expressive power of language as follows: *athavā vyakter lakṣaṇayāvagamaḥ | yathā nīlo ghaṭa ity atra nīlaśabdasya nīlaguṇaviśiṣṭe lakṣaṇā tathā jātivācakasya tadviśiṣṭe lakṣaṇā | Vedāntaparibhāṣā* (*Āgamapariccheda*), page 105, line 8-page 106, line 2.

6 For the use of *lakṣaṇā*, see *Pañcaprakriyā* of Sarvajñātman. For discussions, see Kocmarek 1985.

7 This division rests on eight varieties of *rūḍha* and thirty-two varieties of result (*phala*), each of which is further divided into two, based on whether the word or sentence meaning predominates. See SD, 35–53.

8 For treatment on *alaṅkāras*, see Gonda 1939; Raghavan 1962; Gerow 1971; and Warder 1972.

9 For similarity and metaphor, see Ortony 1979b: 186–201.

10 SD, Ch. 10, verses 22–26 and the auto-commentary thereon.

11 For the varieties of *rūpaka*, see Gerow 1971: 239–59.

12 *yatropamānacitreṇa sarvathāpy uparajyate | upameyamayī bhittis tatra rūpakam iṣyate || Candrāloka* 5.18. There are generally eight variants of *rūpaka* listed in Sanskrit poetics.

13 See Ballantine and Mitra, page 363.

14 Jayadeva defines *samāsokti* as: *samāsoktiḥ parisphūrtiḥ prastute'prastutasya cet | ayam aindrīmukhaṃ paśya raktaś cumbati candramāḥ || Candrāloka* 5.62. For discussion, see *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 10.56.

15 *anākramya jagat sarvaṃ na sandhyāṃ bhajate raviḥ* | cited in the auto-commentary upon SD 10.56.

16 Lakoff 1993.

17 This relates to the limitation of language in describing reality. Advaitins prefer the use of negation, and so do the Mādhyamikas, due to the inability of language to describe reality. Even the discourse through negation is nonetheless a description though, the metaphoric one. When explaining sentences such as 'you are that' (*tat tvam asi*), Advaitins utilize implication, as the literal could not be the intended meaning. Advaitins also reject that being (*sat*), consciousness (*cid*) or bliss (*ānanda*) can describe the Brahman in reality, arguing that these terms are used only to negate their opposites. This has led to the wrong conclusion for many though, maintaining that language fails to describe the truth. The case is that language has transcended its literal scope and been metaphoric when describing reality.

18 Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3.

19 *Saundaryalaharī*, verse 48.

20 For the metaphoric language in the Vedas, see Bergaigne 1935–36; Bloomfield 1919; Shastri 1948; Johnson 1976, 1980; and Velankar 1938, 1940, 1963, 1969.

21 While the text explored here is in Sanskrit, even the vernacular Tantric and Siddha literature is equally metaphoric. For a select study of Tantric poetry, see Jackson 2004; Bagchi 1934, 1935, 1938; Guenther 1969, 1993; Jackson 1992; Bailly 1987; Dimock 1966; and Urban 2001.

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22 This structure of seats is quite common among Mahāvidyā deities or Āmnāya deities. Tripurasundarī, for instance, is visualized seated on top of five *pretas* where the fifth one constitutes Sadāśiva. Guhyakālī or some other deities in the Nothern transmission are depicted standing atop Mahākāla who in turn is seated atop Sadāśiva.
23 *Harivaṃśa* 3.34–41. Cited in Daniélou 1964: 76.
24 Bakhtin 1981: 272. See also Auer and Pfander 2011.
25 For the classical treatment on this concept, see *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, *Pratyakṣa* section. For discussion, see Gupta 1995. For the metaphor of consciousness as oceanic, see Masson 1980.
26 There is even one title of a text, *Cidgaganacandrikā* that exploits this metaphor.
27 The doctrine of *spanda* rests on this metaphor of the absolute or pure consciousness pulsating. The most systematic treatment of the concept of *spanda* can be found in the *Spandakārikā*.
28 For metaphors in the myths of Śiva, see O'Flaherty 1973, 1981.
29 For a Sāṅkhya treatment of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, see Larson 1969. For the additional works on Sāṅkhya besides the masterpiece *Sāṅkhyakārikā*, see *Sāṅkhyasaṅgraha*. For a historical analysis, see Śāstrī 1979.
30 Skora 2007a, 2007b, 2009.
31 See *Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa* for Abhinava's treatment on *aham*. For discussions, see Dupuche 2001.
32 For the metaphor of heart in Tantras, see Müller-Ortega 1987.
33 For the metaphor, "*time is space*," see Fauconnier and Turner in Gibbs 2008: 53–66.
34 For the metaphoric and metonymic application of sex, see Davidson 2002, 2003; Faure 1998; Shaw 1995; Urban 2003, 2006; Wedemeyer 2002, 2012; and White 2006.
35 For select studies on metaphor and cognition, see Fauconnier 1985; Gibbs 1987: 31–48; and Wilson and Sperber 1988: 133–53.
36 Proudfoot 1987.
37 Cooey 1994: 47.
38 For select references, see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Johnson 1987; Gibbs 2004; and Lakoff 1987. This is congruent with the position of Yu, that "conceptual metaphors emerge from the interaction between body and culture" (Gibbs 2008: 247).
39 For discussion, see Merleau-Ponty 1979.
40 For discussion, see Nagatomo 1992: 3–28.
41 For discussion, see Igarashi *et al.* 2007: 190–208.
42 For the ritual of *bhūta-śuddhi*, see Flood 2001.
43 For interpretation of the gestures in Śrīvidyā tradition, see *Yoginīhṛdaya* 1.57–71.
44 For the association of these energies with the two letters '*a*' and '*h*,' see *Tantrāloka*, Chapter 3; and the *Ṛjuvimarśinī* and *Artharatnāvalī* commentaries on *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava* 1.12.
45 For discussion, see Kövecses 2005; Shore 1996; and Gibbs and Steen 1999.
46 For discussion on conceptual metaphors, see Forceville 2005.

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Section 3

Image compression and decompression

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4 Blended images in Tantric visualization

Cognitive framework

The scope of this chapter is an exploration of Tantric images in light of the cognitive theory of 'conceptual blending.'[1] After briefly introducing the key concepts and technical terms, I will introduce three sets of Tantric images (Yoginīs,[2] Kubjikā,[3] and Siddhalakṣmī[4]) and initiate the discussion. This analysis does not apply only for reading the examples offered here. The Buddhist Tantras, for instance, utilize the same mechanism of conceptual integration in the construction of images. In this chapter, I have limited analysis only to examples from the Śaiva Śākta traditions in order to not overshadow the arguments. The main argument here is that the cognitive approach can inform the analysis of opaque and complex images of Tantric deities with their many heads, arms, and weapons that often puzzle viewers. This approach is not intended to reduce these images to a mere cognitive mechanism, but to explore new ways to engage the visual culture.

Inspired by Arthur Koestler (1964), Fauconnier and Turner have advanced the theory of 'conceptual blending' as a general theory of cognition. Following the proponents of this theory, conceptual blending is an evolutionary trait and is common to our everyday language, art, rituals, myths, and various other human transactions. Soon after its introduction, this theory inspired many scholars, and in addition to a number of dissertations, it has been applied in diverse areas such as semiotics, education, language, culture, and emotion studies.[5] This essay is not about evaluating the cognitive theory. Instead, the objective here is to explore how this theory that is still in the making can be applied to read the complex visual culture of Tantras where the deities have multiple hands and heads. Deities in poly-anthropomorphic forms from diverse cultures have perplexed viewers and have often been subject to misunderstanding. This application of cognitive blending rests on the underlying assumption that cognitive mechanisms play a role in the development of complex imagery. Although Fauconnier and Turner have explored the role of the cognitive mechanism of integration in analyzing human creativity, the application of this theory to understand the opaque Tantric culture is original to this author.[6] While images from any culture demonstrate various cognitive

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mechanisms at play, engaging Tantric images in particular introduces a different approach to the existing trends of historical and comparative studies. Blending different images from various inputs can be found in any culture and is visible in earliest arts of humankind.[7] That being said, Tantric images provide the viewer with the opportunity to decompress various traits of any given image from *within* the Tantric system, and analyzing Tantric images in particular allows us to explore the ways contemplative practices are enhanced by their visualization techniques.[8] The practice of visualization vividly describes this process. The central deity in the *maṇḍala* is first viewed as emanating the circles of deities surrounding her and constituting the *maṇḍala,* and then visualized as returning back to the primordial form with the central deity reabsorbing the emanations. I will demonstrate with three examples how the cognitive model of conceptual blending applies in analyzing Tantric images. The deity images explored here, those of Yoginī, Kubjikā, and Siddhalakṣmī, manifest in clusters, and the manuals detail how the images of these deities integrate various other deities as their complex forms evolve. Conceptual blending thus helps us theorize one of the most perplexing issues of Tantric visual culture.

Psychologists have established that conceptually generated images and the perception of real objects are similar in multiple ways. Various studies have demonstrated that regardless of the way we rotate mental imagery, assume distance within an image, or make decisions regarding its shape, we nonetheless respond to mental imagery the same way that we respond to external stimuli. An essential concept key to advancing this study of Tantric images is the paradigm of the cognitive map, which is a mental representation of the external surroundings. Although this map resembles reality, the mind's task of selection and projection is already at play in remembering those maps. It is common to have verbal description elicit mental images, and those images lead to verbal description. It will soon be clear in this discussion that these Tantric images function as cognitive maps to suggest specific thoughts to the practitioner in the course of meditation.

Cognitive scientists have identified that integration of various inputs is at the core of conceptualization. It is not only humans but also pigeons that are seen to have concepts. In various experiments, pigeons have demonstrated the ability to recognize the pictures of fish, landscapes, or even the distorted images of the cartoon character Charlie Brown.[9] Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 6–15) credit the evolutionary cognitive mechanism of conceptual blending for our ability to identify entities experienced in two different times and places. Imagination plays a vital role in this process. These three skills of drawing a cognitive map, establishing identity, and imagination, following the theory of conceptual blending, integrate two different physical spaces or times, multiple causes and effects, and/or other vital relations. The basic idea is that common elements inherent to different inputs integrate in one image, and what is represented refers to many different particulars. Limned meanings from different inputs are compressed in this process that gives rise to a single

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image. The emergent structure shares commonalities, and what arises as a new structure borrows nuances from its different sources. Turner describes this process of compression in the example of the Hall of Bulls in the Lascaux Caves (Turner 2006: 99) and makes the case that the integration of different cognitive modalities has been occurring in art since the Upper Paleolithic era. One of the particular abilities of the mind is its capacity to integrate its contents over time.[10] Addressing this cognitive phenomenon, Turner (2006: 93–113) details the process of conceptual integration in art.[11] As will be explicit, reading Tantric images in light of this framework allows us to unravel hitherto unknown dimensions of opaque forms.

Students are sometimes given the assignment to imagine what they would do if they were the president. In this hypothetical scenario, the child has to see in his mind his present self (auto-noesis) and project himself as the president in his mental space. Fauconnier and Turner define mental space as "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for the purposes of local understanding and action."[12] In conceptual integration, we fuse different mental spaces. In the example of the child imagining himself as the president, two different inputs are mentally mapped: 1) the child's subjective state mirrored in his mental space, and 2) the president (or what it represents to the child). These are called input spaces. What applies in conceptual blending is a cross-space mapping, where different inputs are blended into one. In this example, the child imagines himself sitting in the Oval Office. A generic space maps onto each of the inputs (human agency for instance in the above example). Following the theory of conceptual integration, the 'blend' is the fourth mental space wherein two different spaces are mapped in the generic space (third space), and an emergent structure rises in the mind, one that was not existent in the inputs. In this way, when our mind integrates various concepts, we are establishing new mental spaces, analyzing similarities and differences across spaces, projecting particular aspects from different inputs to a blend, and carrying out various operations in the blend, constantly giving rise to new structures.

What is consistent in conceptual integration is the compression of vital relations. In the example of the child's assignment, what the child would do if he were the president, he identifies himself as the president in the blended space. Situational change is vital in this imagined presidency. In addition to change, something else keeps different inputs bound together, and that is the identity or the shared ground. Other vital relations include time, space, cause and effect, part and whole, representation (where a sketch represents the person), role (an element can be linked, as a role, to another element that counts as its value), similarity, uniqueness, etc.

Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 119–35) introduce four types of networks to describe the cognitive mechanism: simplex, mirror, single-scope, and double-scope. When two entities are linked with each other, the relation is made through the simplex network. Relating two entities requires an additional cognitive process besides simply knowing two discrete entities. A mirror

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network describes a more complex cognitive process. In this, both input spaces share the same organizing frame, and this frame is also shared by the blend.[13] When one single agent is depicted performing multiple tasks in the blended space, that reflects the mirror network. Here, different inputs mingle and do not demonstrate a clash. However, when this is not the case, the integration network becomes even more complex. The single-scope network consists of the blend where the inputs from one organizing frame are projected onto another.[14] This type of projection is common to source-target metaphors where distinct properties inherent to A are projected onto B, and due to the clash resulting from the imposition of characteristics from source to target, one thing provides insight to the other. In the case of the double-scope network, there are different organizing frames where the emergent structure borrows elements from different inputs. However, what sustains this network is the clash between the given inputs. In a complex structure, the mechanism of 'megablend' depicts the structure where one pre-existing blended space merges with another input (which in itself can be a blended space) and gives rise to a new blend. This mechanism of blending more than two inputs is also found in our everyday language.[15] Blending various images is quite common in Photoshop. The analysis of various Tantric images demonstrates that Tantrics exploit innumerable possibilities in creatively giving rise to different conceptual structures.

Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 123) argue that the "organizing frame for a mental space is a frame that specifies the nature of the relevant activity, events, and participants." One of the factors that leads to conceptual integration is the mirroring of aspects of other inputs that constitute the generic space. Among the examples discussed in this chapter, the weapons of any deity reflect this mirror network when various aspects are integrated into a single image that represents particular functions or different roles played by the same deity in different mythical times. In contrast, the conventional source–target metaphors are considered to be 'single scope' networks, where, between two inputs with different organizing frames, only one organizing frame is projected into the blend. Rather than giving rise to a third image by blending two distinct sources, this mode of integration displays the projection of select aspects pertinent to one image onto another. Deities borrow select weapons, gestures, or postures from others in various Tantric visualizations in order to display their integrative nature. This process can be analyzed by applying the single-scope network.

Conceptual integration exploits factually contradictory connections between inputs; they develop structure not intrinsic to the source, and in so doing, they rely on conceptual structure (Ruiz de Medoza Ibáñez 1998: 259–74). After a blend, the blended space may constitute an input for future blends. In the case of Tantric images, one emergent structure appears to be in flux, intermingling with other forms, borrowing properties from other inputs, and essentially evolving into more complex forms.

Conceptual blend depends upon information derived from different inputs. In an image, there are more than two domains from which the inputs are

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derived. Coulson and Oakley (2005: 1515) argue that if the information in each of the inputs is very different, the integration can produce an extremely novel result. They give credit to two factors for this: 1) it presents a clash of competencies, and 2) it accommodates the viewpoint of the speaker (ibid., 1517). Mental space in blend can be anything found in the agent's perceived, imagined, or remembered scenario. They can be prompted by belief, images, or situations. In this process, radically different types of domains collectively constitute a mental space. What is unique to the blend is that it always requires imagination and mental imaging. Besides the integration of properties from different inputs that occurs in the blend, disintegration appears to be an equally prominent cognitive feature that allows us to analyze the elements of synthetic concepts. The plasticity of visualized images, supported by myths that allow the deities to emanate from different sources, gives rise to different deities with their multiple sets of arms and heads, and makes this disintegration easier. Here, since bodies are in flux, they can interact and disintegrate for future shaping.

Prior to concluding this introductory passage on the cognitive framework, a few additional notes are pertinent. One, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 56–60) point out that most of our concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts. This statement is crucial for our analysis, as the images that we explore here are horizontally spread in a sense that rather than one image emerging out of the other and some being really basic images, there is a greater fluidity among images, with each deity affecting the form of the other when the complex imagery arises. The practice of visualization demands compression of multiple thoughts into a single image. These images are consciously preserved in memory, brought alive through mental projection, and are manipulated in the mental space in accordance with the system of visualization. Another essential concept from Johnson (1987) is that our imagination has a bodily basis and our cognitive process relies on our embodied experience. Johnson gives the example of the body as a container, where we organize our daily experiences in container terms such as 'in' and 'out.' The body of the deity 'contains' particular aspects, and when the deity displays multiple weapons and gestures, this signifies a reservoir of the qualities attributed to those symbols. Finally, cognitive scientists disagree about the nature of concepts. While some consider them to be *logogens* that resemble the spoken language, others maintain that concepts are actually *imagens* that resemble images (Paivio 1971, 1986, 1991). The image that is generated in visualization combines multiple concepts, and while being an image, these are also equated with *mantras*. In this way, these images display the properties of both language and image. Tantras consider images and *mantras* as interchangeable, and the blending of an image occurs in the same way that *mantras* are constructed, by combining complex seed *mantras* (such as *hrīṃ, sauṃ, phreṃ*, etc.).

All images have the potential to depict multiple relations and complex, related concepts. This process can be understood in terms of mirror networks. A deity seated in a particular vehicle or a seat depicts her association to

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another deity or concept. Kālī sitting atop a corpse in the cremation ground depicts both her relation to death and time, and in essence, her transcendence to time. The chopped head or the sword that she carries indicates a specific role that she plays or a particular act that she accomplishes. Even the most basic image with two hands describes two different roles, and in consequence, two concepts. Thus, the concept of mirror network has relevance to a fruitful exploration of Tantric images.

Single-scope networks, as discussed earlier, are prototypes of source-target metaphors. In the case of this network, rather than having a new blended structure, properties of one are imposed upon the other. When a deity, without changing her name, incorporates the properties of other deities and thus their functions, the new image can be analyzed following this network. Often times, the shift in weapons and gestures or an inclusion of new properties from other sources indicate that this process is at work.

Tantric images most commonly display the double-scope blend and multiple blends. In the case of Ardhanārīśvara, for instance, the images of Śiva and Śakti merge in a single image with clearly distinguishable properties. The deity image incorporates the characteristics from both, while the ritual or *mantras* give the deity a distinctly unique status. In other words, the new structure becomes an entity in itself that cannot simply be reduced to the two sources. Another example is that of Lokapuruṣa, where the cosmos is depicted within the human body. Two sources, the world and the body, are compressed in a single structure, giving rise to this imagery. The very term *loka-puruṣa* or the 'cosmos-man' vividly illustrates the two constituents that comprise the image, with *loka* referring to the world, and *puruṣa* identifying the individual. In the blend, the two domains of the body and the world are integrated, with all cosmic planes depicted within the body. While an individual is confined in space and time, the world, the total extent of time and space, is mapped within the body. What makes this integration powerful is the disparity between the finite body and the infinite cosmos. The generic space is the embodiedness, as the worldview supports the premise that the world is the divine body. This double-scope blend is the most common among the conceptual frameworks that are at play in giving rise to Tantric images.[16] Another example that vividly illustrates this is the image of Vajrasattva who represents the integration of two different polarities. The two attributes the deity carries, the lightening bolt and the lotus, depict wisdom and compassion. Stemming from the basic symbolism of two genders, these attributes incorporate conceptual metaphors to signify distinct meanings shared within the communities of the practitioners.

Besides the double-scope blend, other conceptual mechanisms that are at play in giving rise to a myriad of Tantric images are the frameworks of mega-blend and multiple-blend. In the first case, a preexisting blended structure merges with a new form, resulting in a new structure. In the case of multiple blends, different network-scopes merge and give rise to a new image. The most popular image of Durgā with eighteen arms demonstrates multiple blends. In

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the myth, all the gods defeated in battle with a demon distill their energies that then turn into flame and consolidate in the form of Durgā. The weapons she carries in her eighteen arms represent aspects from each of the deities.

Yoginīs and their sequence

Various forms of Yoginīs were worshipped in India since ancient times. Their roles, rituals, and visualizations have changed over time. As a result, the Yoginīs have been grouped in different configurations. I will present in this context only those visualized in *kuṇḍalinī* practice, as it represents one of the central constituents in the Tantric practice. My objective here is to demonstrate how the cognitive framework can assist us in unraveling gradually evolving complex forms visualized in different *cakras*. I consider the template used in analyzing the Yoginī images as archetypal that can be replicated to describe a myriad of Tantric forms.

The Yoginīs visualized in the seven *cakras* clearly demonstrate the concept of integrating images to give rise to new forms. In this depiction, the Yoginīs of the higher *cakras* absorb the energies, and thus the heads, of the lower Yoginīs. Noteworthy of this visualization is the inversion of the cosmos within the body: corporeal centers are stimulated through visualization of *cakras* and the six Yoginīs are visualized in this process, reciprocating six emanations of Śiva.[17]

The Yoginīs distributed within the mental space of a yogin demonstrate the process of the rise of complex imagery in Tantras. The most frequently occurring object, although not carried by all of them, is the skull cup. This attribute suggests the link of these deities to the Kāpālika pantheon. Except for Hākinī, the Yoginī residing in the sixth *cakra*, all other deities have four arms, a general metaphor of four directions, which in turn, is a metaphor of all-pervasiveness. Six arms simply include directions above and below, reconfirming the all-pervasiveness of the deity. With this understanding, the difference in the number of arms here does not change the original meaning that the goddess is omnipresent.

Examination of the differing number of heads of each Yoginī allows access to deciphering these complex images. The higher the *cakra*, the more complex is the imagery, with the number of heads exactly paralleling the number of the *cakra*. For instance, Ḍākinī in the first *cakra* is visualized with a single head, while Lākinī in the third *cakra* has three, Śākinī in the fifth *cakra* has five, and Hākinī in the sixth *cakra* possesses six heads.

The integration of heads comes to the apex with Yākinī having 21 heads (6+5+4+3+2+1), as she suggests the collective energy of all the lower *cakras*. She carries all the weapons carried by the deities in the lower realms. The multiple faces of a single deity can mean that the single deity simultaneously carries out multiple functions, and that multiple deities merge in a single body of the deity in order to carry out a collective action. An example can be given of the goddess Yākinī, whose body is the integration of the bodies of all the six Yoginīs.

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Table 4.1 Yoginīs of the Six Cakras

Weapons	*Ḍākinī (A)*[18]	*Ḍākinī (B)*[19]	*Rākiṇī*[20]	*Lākinī*[21]	*Kākinī*[22]	*Śākinī*[23]	*Hākinī*[24]
traits	one head, red color	one head, red color	two heads, dark color	three heads, black color	four heads, yellowish color	five faces, flamelike, fangs	Six faces, white color
skull staff (khaṭvāṅga)	♣	♣					
skull cup	♣	♣ (*cup*)	♣		♣		♣
trident (triśikha)	♣				♣		
shield	♣	♣					
counting beads			♣				♣
spear		♣	♣				
drum			♣				♣
šakti				♣			
bolt				♣			
stick				♣			
gesture of fearlessness				♣	♣		
sacred thread					♣		
goad						♣	
lotus						♣	♣
book						♣	
gesture of wisdom						♣	♣
freshly severed head							♣

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This integration of heads in a particular order describes the sequence of various Tantric categories. First, the rise from the first *cakra* to the second one is not a spatial shift. In commonsense space, one cannot be at two places at the same time, but in this blended space, the Yoginīs in the higher *cakras* represent the merging of Yoginīs from the lower *cakras*. Tantras meticulously describe the rise of *kuṇḍalinī* as the surge of bliss that manifests in successive order, and depicts the collective nature of the bliss experienced in the elevated state of consciousness. Tantras describe the ultimate experience as the 'universal bliss' (*jagadānanda*), and the blended image of the Yoginī depicts this surge of bliss as a collective whole of all other forms of bliss experienced in the lower states of consciousness.

The image of Kubjikā

Just like Yoginīs represent one of the earliest forms of goddess worship in India, Kubjikā distinctively marks early Tantrism. This approach of applying conceptual integration to explore Kubjikā forms facilitates the understanding of other deity images. The fusion of multiple deities and consequentially their roles can be identified in the graphic depiction of Kubjikā. This integration of different functions relies on the compression of different images, and various functions display the specific model of blend identified as mega-blend that compresses multiple relations in a single image. These images display the compression of time in a single space by showing a series of gestures and weapons that metonymically refer to specific functions. In the same way, deities residing in different locales are compressed in a single image by simply assigning them specific places in a *maṇḍala* or by merging their faces or appropriating their weapons into the new, single image. The archetypal image of Kubjikā demonstrates this complex integration and it can be used as a template to describe various other Tantric images.

While the Trika imagery of the Pūrva or Eastern transmission (*āmnāya*) parallels the triadic goddesses of the Purāṇas in the form of Kālī, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvatī, the imagery of Kubjika, the deity of the Western transmission, is at the center of all the deities belonging to Western and Northern transmissions. The integral body of the goddess is vividly depicted in the visualization of Kubjikā, particularly in her Vīrakubjikā emanation. The goddess has three heads and six arms. Her three faces are of white, red, and blue or dark color, and with her six arms, she carries a blossom with gems, a skull, and a book on her left arms, and a spear, sword, and a strand of crystal beads on her right arms.[25] The colors of her three faces clearly describe three *guṇas*. Among the six arms, the two carrying the book and counting beads made of crystal indicate *sattva*, those carrying the blossom and sword indicate *rajas*, and those carrying a skull and spear indicate *tamas*. Furthermore, the weapons on the right side are more masculine, such as spear or sword, whereas the blossom, the cup, and the book indicating wisdom (*prajñā*, in feminine form) on her left demonstrate feminine attributes. The image of Kubjikā thus

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Table 4.2 Face deities of Kubjikā[26]

Weapons and Gestures	*Parā Uppermost Face*	*Mālinī Upper Face*	*Siddha-yogeśvarī Eastern Face*	*Kālī Southern Face*	*Tripura-bhairavī Northern Face*	*Carcikā*[27] *Western Face*
traits	one face, white, radiant	five faces, rising sun		emaciated, seated atop 3 heads	vermilion red, matted hair, peaceful	
gesture of fearlessness		♣			♣	
gesture of boons		♣			♣	
skull cup				♣		♣
spear		♣				♣
bow		♣				
arrows		♣				
counting beads	♣	♣			♣	
book	♣				♣	
snake		♣				
mirror		♣				
diamond bolt		♣				
conch shell		♣				
additional attributes				ear of a small child		

integrates all *guṇas*, different roles according to those *guṇas*, and above all, the harmony of these strands that suggest mother Prakṛti in her primordial form.

The visualization of Kubjikā also demonstrates the integration process in which a single deity represents multiple divinities. The morning visualization of Vīrakubjikā, for instance, has five faces and ten arms. Her upper face is identified with the deity Parāparā and is considered to the face of Kubjeśvarī. The eastern face of the goddess with the complexion of lightening is identified as Siddhayogeśvarī. The southern face is identified as Kālikā, the western face as Umā, and the northern face as Mahālakṣmī, with a complexion of crystal.[28] It is noteworthy that the texts instructing visualization not only detail the image of Kubjikā, they also describe which face corresponds to which particular deity.

The visualization of Aghorakubjikā with six faces gives a similar account of the synthesis of multiple deities. Her first upper face is identified as that of Parā, of the complexion of milk. Her second upper face is identified as that of Gaganamālinī, also of white color. Her third face, eastern in the second row, is of pale yellow color, demonstrating wrath and identified as that of Siddhayogeśvarī. Her fourth face in the south is dark and is identified as Mahākālī. Her fifth and northern face is identified with Mahālakṣmī and is

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Figure 4.1 Kubjikā

visualized with the complexion of a pomegranate flower. Her sixth and western face is identified with Umā and is of a dark complexion.[29]

The image of Siddhalakṣmī

The previous examples have confirmed that the integration of multiple images into one is not an isolated occurrence in the Tantras. The following case study of Siddhalakṣmī demonstrates the plasticity of images and an integration of particularly contrasting aspects of deities in a single form. Multiple deities share the name of this deity, and an analysis of these reveals the complex integrative process occurring in the development of Tantric imagery. Therefore, the image of Siddhalakṣmī can be considered a template for the study of the generative nature of merged images, just like the image of Kubjikā.[30] Her complex visualization gives a glimpse of the system that lies beneath the plethora of forms manifesting in correspondence to their *mantras* and *maṇḍalas*. The blended image of Lakṣmī identified as Siddhalakṣmī compresses various deities of Śaivite, Vaiṣṇavite, and Buddhist Tantric pantheons. In these blends, deities retain their identities while self-replicating in relation to the deities that surround her.

The tradition of Siddhalakṣmī has remained cloistered among select Tantric practitioners.[31] She is generally invoked with five faces, fifteen eyes, and

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ten arms.[32] She rides on top of a dark Bhairava, wears a multi-color *sari*, and her body, including her central face, is white. Distribution of *guṇas* and the primacy of *sattva* over *tamas* are explicit in this depiction. The fluid substance, water or wine placed in the vase the goddess carries, metaphorically represents consciousness. This fluidity of consciousness in assuming forms here becomes a metaphor for the plasticity of the deity images.

Tantras relate Siddhalakṣmī to the Northern transmission (*āmnāya*), the pantheon of Kālī. The goddess is invoked as 'She Who Binds The Sequence Of Kālīs.'[33] As the Northern transmission of Kālī prevalent in Nepal sustains nuances of the early Krama system, and as the ritual manuals relate Kālī and Siddhalakṣmī, the term 'sequence of Kālīs' cannot be accidental here. Siddhalakṣmī, thus, is prominent among the deities in the Kālī order. Some of the attributes for Siddhalakṣmī found in inscriptions echo those of Kālī, as she is described as terrifying (*karālā*), and the destroyer of time (*kālakālī*).[34] Further confirming this relationship, the Pāṭan inscription addresses this deity as Siddhikālī.[35] Her identity as Lakṣmī and her invocation as Kālī incorporates the most stunning beauty with an embodiment of wrath. The same inscription invokes the deity as abiding within Śrī Cakra, the structure for worshipping the beautiful goddess Tripurā.[36] This imagery is not possible to envision without blending the already existing images of Kālī and Tripurā with their apparent contrasts.

Table 4.3 Visualizations of Siddhalakṣmī

Gestures and weapons	SL_1[37]	SL_2[38]	SL_3	SL_4	SL_5[39]	SL_6	SL_7[40]	SL_8[41]
skull club (khaṭvāṅga)	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
goad	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*?[42]
noose	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
spear/trident	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
arrows		*						
freshly chopped head			*		*	*	*	*
vase		*			*		*	
sword	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
gesture of boons	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
gesture of protection	*	*	*	*	*	*		
skull cup	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
hatchet	*							
book	*							
counting beads				*			*	
shield				*				
bell				*		*		*
gesture of threat (tarjanī)							*	*

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Table 4.4 Eight Lakṣmīs of the Siddhalakṣmī family[43]

Weapons	*VL*	*TSL*	*JL*	*ML*	*JyL*	*ŚL*	*PL*	*GL*
skull club (khaṭvāṅga)	*	*					*	
goad	*				*	*	*	*
noose	*				*	*	*	*
spear/trident	*	*					*	*
arrows		*		*		*		
chopped head	*						*	*
water vase					*		*	*
sword	*	*					*	*
gesture of boons		*	*	*			*	*
gesture of fearlessness			*	*			*	*
skull cup	*				*		*	*
hatchet (ṭanka)								
book								
counting beads		*						
shield	*							
spear (paṭṭiśa)	*							
bell	*							*
white lotus	*							
Indian lute [2 arms]	*							
drum (*ḍamaru*)		*						
citron		*						
Snake		*						
lotus [blue]		*						
lotus [red]			* *	*				
conch shell				*				
discus (cakra)				*				
mace				*				
bow				*		*		

Notes: TSL = Trailokyasundarī-lakṣmī ŚL = Śaktilakṣmī
JL = Jayalakṣmī PL = Pratyaṅgirālakṣmī
ML = Mohinīlakṣmī GL = Ghoralakṣmī
VL = Viśvalakṣmī JyL = Jyeṣṭhālakṣmī

The visualizations of Siddhalakṣmī appear to spring from the root image of five faces and ten arms. Eight different visualizations as presented in Chart 3 depict her accordingly. There are eight Lakṣmīs following this pantheon (see Chart 4), where Siddhalakṣmī is the central deity surrounded by eight different goddesses of power and prosperity. These eight Lakṣmīs manifest with ten arms as well. As Siddhalakṣmī is considered the collective identity of all five transmissions, every emanation of the goddess demonstrates the same characteristics with particular focus on one or another aspect.

There are, however, a number of other visualizations that differ from the early template described above. In one of these distinctive variations, the goddess is viewed with sixteen arms, carrying at her right side a sword, arrows, spear, disc, a missile (*śakti*), mace, counting beads, scissors, and a slab, bow, snake, noose, axe, drum, a baby jackal, and a skull-bowl on her left.[44] An image in

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Figure 4.2 Siddhalakṣmī

the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago fits this description.[45] Ritual manuals describe even more complex visualizations, with the goddess having a Viśvarūpa form.[46]

If we analyze the eight Lakṣmīs considered to be the manifestation of Siddhalakṣmī, the most commonly recurring weapons and gestures are a noose, a goad, the gesture granting boons, and the gesture of fearlessness. Notably, these are the gestures of Tripurā in her Bālā emanation. One image, thus, is the blueprint for the rise of other images. These hidden structures are often described in terms of myths relating one deity to another, or with ritual association. This cross-reference of deities allows us to read the integrated forms more closely. For instance, the image of Viśvalakṣmī bears many characteristics of Guhyakālī and it is noteworthy that both Siddhalakṣmī and Gukyakālī are considered the deities belonging to northern transmission. Viśvalakṣmī rides a crocodile or water buffalo. She has eighteen arms and five faces, each with three eyes. She has one dark human face while her upper face is of a horse, the southern face is of an elephant, the northern face is of a donkey, and the western face is of a jackal. She is seen as being intoxicated by the consumption of wine and blood; she consumes the poison of snakes and the flesh of deities and demons. Her mouth is filled with the entrails of human beings. She wears a crown decorated with the heads of the lords of different realms, and she is adorned with snakes on her abundant breasts. The integral character of an image is also explicit in the case of Mohinīlakṣmī. According

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to *Dhyānamālā*, she is visualized as merging two divine aspects with properties of Viṣṇu and Bhuvaneśvarī. Although images often distinguish one deity from another, the visualization of Śaktilakṣmī is identical to that of Tripurasundarī. The distinctive feature here is the very name of the goddess.

The interconnection between ritual and image becomes vivid in the visualization of Viśvalakṣmī. The *Dhyānamālā* (DM) manual specifies that the goddess is seen as having a white complexion for peaceful purposes.[47] Accordingly, the deity is visualized with the weapons a practitioner wants her to carry in order to achieve those powers that the weapons represent. In her peaceful emanation, she rests upon a white lotus. The same deity is visualized as having a dark red hue for the practice of controlling and attracting others, while a black complexion denotes the purpose of killing.[48] This description suggests the fluidity of forms while highlighting the distinct purposes of each of these visualizations.

Besides the cognitive reasons behind integrating images for cultivating highly synthetic forms of experience, there are also socio-cultural reasons. Deity images are borrowed from different pantheons in the process of domesticating the practices of the Kāpālikas (in the case of Kālī), or of various other creeds in society. Since every family has its own 'family deity' (*kula devatā*), the merger of families can initiate this process of blending deity images. The case of Harihara, where the images of Viṣṇu and Śiva are merged, is a prominent example. The deity introduced from another pantheon often changes her original appearance so that she bears some resemblance to the central deity. Pratyaṅgirā, for instance, is an independent deity with her own tradition. When invoked in the *maṇḍala* of Siddhalakṣmī, she resembles her, and is visualized as having a white complexion, with ten arms and five faces.[49] The same goddess is also invoked in Vajrayāna Buddhism, although the visualization differs. She has a single face instead of five. Both deities display the noose, goad, and the gestures of granting boons and fearlessness; however, Pratyaṅgirā, as visualized in the Vajrayāna practice, carries a lotus and trident instead of a skull-staff and skull-cup.[50] This indicates that Pratyaṅgirā, as visualized in Tantric Buddhism, is more benign compared to her Śaivite emanation. The Vajrayāna equivalent of Guhyakālī, the Nairātmā, lacks the weapons present in the visualization of Pratyaṅgirā, and the skull-staff and skull-bowl are likewise absent.[51] The black magic of killing and casting spells is supposedly countered by visualizing Pratyaṅgirā in ferocious black form with four arms, three eyes, riding over Sadāśiva, bearing a skull cup, skull staff, noose, and mallet. In this form, she is depicted as eating fat and blood.[52] Evidently, the same deity is viewed in extremely opposite forms.

The diversity in divine form reflects the capacity to carry out acts desired by the aspirant. The more the deities are viewed as efficient in fulfilling desires, the more their forms change. Eventually, when the traditions evolve, the forms and attributes of the deities follow. For instance, the visualization of Pratyaṅgirā differs for each of the actions she is invoked to carry out. For peaceful purposes, she manifests with a white complexion, while for nourishment,

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she appears with a reddish-white hue. For controlling, the goddess assumes the red color that resembles the pomegranate flower. For attraction, she is visualized in a dark red hue, while for immobilization, she appears with an emerald complexion. In another visualization, she manifests in a golden color, whereas in order to drive someone away, the goddess manifests with the color of smoke. For the task of killing, she is invoked with black or reddish black color. For hypnotizing, the deity is seen as having the color of a peacock feather. In order to generate friendship, she is meditated upon as having the iridescent color of a crow. Pratyaṅgirā resembles the moon, when visualized for liberation.[53] These instances suggest that ritual efficacy is at the foundation of image formation, and when the same deity is invoked for multiple objectives, complex forms emerge. Rituals and myths are integrated in this process, paralleling the blending of images.

The visualization of Siddhalakṣmī can be compared to that of Siddheśvarī found in *Dhyānamālā*. Siddheśvarī is meditated upon in two different forms, with four or eight arms. The image having four arms is red in color, whereas the eight-armed image is white. The deity, when visualized with four arms, carries a pair of scissors and a skull, and shows the gestures of fearlessness and granting boons. The goddess with eight arms bears a drum, trident, cup, noose, and goad, along with the *tattva* gesture and those of granting boons and fearlessness.[54]

Siddhayogeśvarī bears a striking resemblance to Siddhalakṣmī. Following the *Pratiṣṭhā-lakṣaṇasārasamuccaya* (PSS), Siddhayogeśvarī has ten arms, one face, and three eyes. With her right arms she carries a scripture, sword, drum, and skull, and extends the gesture of granting boons. With her left arms, she carries a bell, shield, skull-staff, trident, and displays the gesture of fearlessness.[55] The only apparent difference is the order in which the weapons are described. It is noteworthy that Siddhayogeśvarī is the fundamental deity of the Trika system, and this resemblance allows us to demonstrate the relationship of the Trika system with the liturgies of the Siddhalakṣmī pantheon.

The visualization of Śaktilakṣmī differs in extending the gestures of granting boons and fearlessness, whereas these are not present in the Siddhayogeśvarī emanation. This similarity further allows us to link Siddhayogeśvarī with this rather esoteric tradition of Lakṣmī. Although most Siddhalakṣmī emanations display the gestures of granting boons and fearlessness, she carries a vase in other visualizations. If two weapons, the noose and goad, are removed from the visualization of Siddhayogeśvarī, this image becomes identical to Siddhacāmuṇḍā, also addressed as Caṇḍeśvarī. The gentle Yogeśvarī and ferocious Caṇḍeśvarī constitute the core of Trika and Krama traditions, and the striking similarity of Siddhalakṣmī with both these deities suggests their common ground. Sanderson links Siddhalakṣmī with the Ekāntavāsinī variant of Kālasaṅkarṣiṇī.[56] As Kālasaṅkarṣiṇī is the central deity of Krama, this identification further strengthens the thesis that Siddhalakṣmī is central to Krama Tantricism.

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The five-faced form of Siddhalakṣmī warrants scrutiny in light of the Krama and Kula systems. In the *krama* initiation of *Sarvāmnāya* (the existing Krama initiation tradition of Nepal), Vajrakubjikā is visualized as having five faces and ten arms, with her eastern face the color of milk, her southern face black, her northern face red, and her western face golden, while her upper face is of the color of crystal. Here, the upper face is addressed as Kubjeśvarī, eastern face as Siddhayogeśvarī, southern face as Kālikā, and northern face as Mahālakṣmī.[57] This visualization has several elements in common with Siddhalakṣmī.

Kubjikā, the central deity of the Kula system, and Siddhalakṣmī share a great resemblance in their visualization. Both have five faces with exactly the same facial color, and both have ten arms, although some of the weapons vary. As mentioned above, the five faces of Vajrakubjikā represent five different divinities, and Vajrakubjikā is her collective identity. In a similar fashion, Siddhalakṣmī embodies all five transmissions with her five faces.

Integrated images of the deity bring different ritual forms into a single practice, and this is vivid in the case of Siddhalakṣmī. Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite elements are equally present in her rituals. Unlike Nārāyaṇa as the consort of Lakṣmī in Purāṇic Hinduism, Siddhalakṣmī is visualized with Bhairava, a ferocious emanation of Śiva. Narasiṃha, considered a manifestation of Viṣṇu, is often invoked as her consort, and is also addressed as Bhairava. The deity is riding Rudra on top of Vetāla, which is not the case with the familiar form of Lakṣmī. This blend gives her image more complexity: although invoked as Kālī, her main face is white. Unlike other deities with white faces who sit on a lotus or other gentle vehicles, she rides a dark, fearsome Rudra. The deity thus is a synthesis of the existing pantheons. If we focus on her naming or even her white face, we may miss the essential part of *mantras* that are integral to her visualization. Although the deity has her Kālī aspect somehow subsumed in her visualization, her *mantras* resemble that of Kālī and Kubjikā.[58]

Analysis and conclusion

Fauconnier and Turner highlight that conceptual blending is an evolutionary process. While this theory has broader applications, my objective here is limited only to the analysis of Tantric images to demonstrate the traits of blending in the integration of various forms and concepts. The examples addressed in the previous section clearly demonstrate that the Tantric practice of blending images can be compared to the diversity of images generated from an application of Photoshop. Tantric manuals exemplify a conscious effort to integrate multiple images. This intentional process of blending gives Tantric images some advantage in exploiting various possible techniques in giving rise to diverse forms. The approach utilized in analyzing the three sets of deities in the previous section can be expanded to explore Vedic, Purāṇic, or any other deity images. At this juncture, the cognitive approach becomes relevant.

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As Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 3) suggest, "we live in the age of the triumph of forms." While reading cultures, literary tradition shadows the studies of visual culture, and even when images are addressed, historical analysis dominates the disciplinary boundaries. While the historical approach has its own relevance, it cannot give full justice to the rationale behind a complex visual culture, as it reduces the rich cognitive process to a linear history. The examples offered above are not reductive, as the generative and integrative nature of an image remains clearly visible in any example. The conceptual integration in an image of Gaṇeśa demonstrates how ubiquitous this process is. Just like a double-scope network is vivid in the image of Gaṇeśa, multiple blends function in the imagery of Trimūrti, the image that merges three Hindu divinities (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra). This integration of images leads to the fusion of *mantras* and rituals alike.

Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 72) also point out that blending is an evolutionary cognitive process that does not happen "on-line from scratch" as "cultures work hard to develop integration resources that can then be handed on with relative ease." What we need to be cautious about here, though, is that it would be misleading to draw a linear history of the evolution of complex imagery, as the same cognitive traits are visible in the Ṛgvedic myth of Puruṣa, wherein a single deity has a thousand heads and arms.

The most basic of integrations that Fauconnier and Turner discuss is that of the mirror network. In this network, entities are related to each other, and while they do not blend and give rise to a new structure, they mirror in one entity the properties belonging to the other. Multiple arms of a deity reflect the compression of different modes of time, space, and events within a single image. All the deities listed above (Yoginī, Kubjikā, and Siddhalakṣmī) come with multiple arms. In each arm, they are carrying weapons or displaying gestures that relate to some mythical act of the deity, or ones that are borrowed from prototypical myth of another deity. Following Hindu myths, deities assume different bodies in different eons and subdue different demons. By integrating these various emanations (*avatāras*) of a deity, these images compress time, space, and action. For instance, the Naṭarāja pose of Śiva integrates multiple roles and myths into a single image. It is not possible to locate the cultural significance of the gestures and postures without knowing the literary culture. The cosmic dance of Śiva at the end of each cycle of creation, the subduing of Andhaka, a demon of darkness, the flow of the Ganges suggesting the liberation of earthbound spirits, the blue neck of Śiva marking his protection of the world by ingesting poison during the churning of the oceans, the elephant hide wrapped around his body that signifies his victory over another demon, all illustrate how a single image stands for multiple myths, different eons, and the different roles the deity played in those times. The mirror network is thus the most fundamental among the cognitive tools to compress space and time.

In the single-scope network, "the organizing frame of the blend is an extension of the organizing frame of one of the inputs but not the other"

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(Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 126). In this structure, the framing input is identified as the 'source' and the focus input is called the 'target.' Once again, we can broadly apply this network in deciphering images. When one deity borrows the weapons or gestures of another to mimic the other's role, this mechanism is explicit. For instance, when Kālī appears in the pose of Naṭarāja, the distinctive role is borrowed from the source to the target. Lakṣmī is usually shown atop a lotus, and when Kālī adopts this benign posture as depicted in the Krama tradition, she takes on Lakṣmī's attributes. In all three sets of images discussed in the previous section, each of the deities assumes the roles of multiple deities. In another example, *maṇḍalas* generally depict guardian deities (Dikpālas) in all directions. When a single deity image displays the primary attributes of these guardian deities, as is the case of Durgā, the target image incorporates different functions borrowed from the source images. And this analysis can be verified from the literary culture.

Turner (2006: 107) points out that the double-scope integrated network is far more impressive in its ability to project different and often clashing inputs from the different organizing frames to the emergent structure. Analysis of the image of Siddhalakṣmī reveals the blend of the two different domains of Kālī and Lakṣmī, where one is dark and the other is red; one is benign and the other, ferocious. In depicting this contradiction, it is essential to note that what is meant by the combined image is the resolution of apparent conflict. The ingenuity of the mind lies in its ability to resolve differences and move beyond paradox. This integration is commonplace in Tantric images, merging and blending different deities within a single image.

One of the elements discussed in the introduction is how identity and difference are two binding factors in integrated images. All the Yoginīs share something in common: their vehicles, the surrounding scene, and some of the weapons. Various forms of Kubjikā or Siddhalakṣmī likewise share common traits that allow us to group them together. What makes application of the double-scope blend possible, however, is the contrast. This is vivid in the above examples. For instance, the group of deities identified as Siddhalakṣmī display contrasting imagery, and each of the images is unique in what new element is introduced.

There are far more complex cognitive processes at play in giving rise to each set of the images discussed above. In the case of the Yoginīs, what is distinctively blended is their bodies: the Yoginī of each higher *cakra* successively has an additional head. The image of Rākiṇī with two faces combines Rākiṇī and Ḍākinī, an explicit example of double-scope network. The image of Lākinī, along the same lines, incorporates the early blend (Rākiṇī) with a new image. This, therefore, is an example of a mega-blend. Even the most basic form of the Yoginī (Ḍākinī) comes with four arms, already a blend of two distinctive images.

In Chart 4, I have listed eight Lakṣmīs from the Siddhalakṣmī family. As has been noted earlier, the very image of Siddhalakṣmī is a case of double-scope blending with two distinctive deities (Siddhayogeśvarī and Lakṣmī) merging into a single image. In the images listed in this chart (for instance,

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that of Trilokyasundarī-Lakṣmī, Jyeṣṭhālakṣmī, or Pratyaṅgirālakṣmī), even the names suggest their merged identity. In these examples of double-scope blending, both sources display a preexisting double-scope network.

Kubjikā and Siddhalakṣmī are also examples of multiple blends, where more than two distinctive sources merge in a new structure. The image of Kubjikā with six faces simultaneously blends six deities (Parā, Mālinī, Siddhayogeśvarī, Kālī, Tripurabhairavī, and Carcikā) in a single image. Since each of the deities merged within the image of Kubjikā come with multiple variants, as demonstrated with Siddhalakṣmī, numerous variants of Kubjikā are likewise possible. In this exploration of multiple blends, the inputs such as Siddhalakṣmī or Tripurabhairavī (the blended form of Tripurā and Bhairavī) already display double-scope blends. Siddhalakṣmī also displays multiple blends and can function as a template for various other deities that come with five faces.[59] Unlike the case of the Yoginīs where the images gradually evolve, the deities with five faces do not reflect this gradual integration.

In essence, one of the defining elements of Tantras is its reliance on imagery. The generative and integrative processes that give rise to a myriad of forms co-evolve with myths, rituals, and *mantras*. One deity image often functions as a template for other deities. This blending of images implicitly describes a broader network that binds different concepts within. The practice of visualization and deity worship help unpack the symbolism beneath these images. These forms can be considered mnemonic in that they remind the viewer of multiple concepts. While the images discussed above depict complex structures that emerge borrowing from multiple inputs, there are even more complex images if we engage some of the Kālī or Tripurā forms. They all nonetheless demonstrate the same integration process where multiple inputs from different sources are exploited in giving rise to a new image. As has been shown, reading the underlying cognitive networks helps us decipher complex processes present in the rise of Tantric visual culture. In consequence, this approach adds one step to shift the dynamics from the literary to visual culture and assists in comprehending the hermeneutic tools for deciphering images.

Notes

1 For a select readings on conceptual blending, see Fauconnier 2001: 255–86; Coulson and Oakley 2000: 175–96; Sweetser 2000: 305–34; Grady 2000: 335–46; Turner and Fauconnier 2000: 133–45; Turner and Fauconnier 1995: 183–203; Fauconnier 2000b; Fauconnier 2005: 523–38; Fauconnier and Turner 1994; Fauconnier and Turner 1998: 269–83; Fauconnier and Turner 1999: 77–90; and Fauconnier and Turner 2003: 79–94.

2 For the tradition of Yoginīs, see Dehejia 1986; White 1996: 2003; and Dhawan 1997.

3 For the studies on Kubjikā, see Dyczkowski 2009; and Heilijger-Seelens 1994.

4 The deity is addressed in manuals and Tantric texts both as Siddhalakṣmī and Siddhilakṣmī. While I have preferenced the name Siddhalakṣmī in this paper because the very name itself is evocative of conceptual blending. I have kept the

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name Siddhilakṣmī in particular cases where the manuals explicitly mention the deity as such.

5 See http://markturner.org/blending.html and '*Center for the Cognitive Science of Metaphor Online*' for the recent publications in conceptual blending.

6 Both Fauconnier and Turner 2002 and Turner 2006 have ample examples from visual materials to demonstrate conceptual blend.

7 Even if we select Indian culture as subject matter for the discourse, complex integration processes are visible in early Vedic myths and poems. The Ṛgvedic myth of Puruṣa, for instance, demonstrates a complex image of Puruṣa with one thousand heads, arms, and legs. Some Vedic deities come in pairs, for instance, Aśvinau, or in a group (Vāyavaḥ). The Vedic deity Agni with multiple heads demonstrates the integration of various ritual fires in the sacrificial order.

8 For historical analysis of complex images in India, see Srinivasan 1997.

9 For some early studies, see Siegel and Honig 1970; and Hernstein *et al.* 1976.

10 Physicalists have preferred to assign this role to the 'brain.' I am not using 'mind' in the same reductive sense. For discussion on neural integration, see Donald in Turner 2006: 3–20.

11 For metonymy, metaphor, and conceptual blending in images, see Sinding 2002: 503–23; Slingerland 2005: 557–84; Sondergaard 1999; Turner 2008a: 13–32; Turner 2007; Turner 2008b; Turner 2002: 9–20; and Turner and Fauconnier 1999: 397–418. For art and conceptual blending, Cienki and Swan 1999; Coulson 1995: 2–12; Turner 2008; Turner 2002: 9–20; Turner 1999: 11–26; Krauss 2005: 92–131; Liddell 1998; Liddell 2000: 331–57; and Maglio and Matlock 1999. For conceptual blending and metaphors, see Fludernik 1999: 383–96; Grady *et al.* 1999; and Turner 2007. For metaphor, body, and the conceptual blend in reading Indian culture, see Hayes 1985; 2003: 162–84; 2005: 19–32; 2006: 41–71; 2012: 1–17; and 2013.

12 Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 40.

13 One of the most cited examples of mirror networks is the riddle of the monk occupying a place in the path at the same hour of two different days, where he climbs the mountain one day and climbs back the other day. For a detailed analysis of this riddle, see Turner 2010.

14 Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 126–27.

15 Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 279–308.

16 The concepts of *mantra-kāya* or mantric body, *kālapuruṣa* or 'time being,' *ādyāśakti* or primordial energy, all depict this double-scope network.

17 Dviraṇḍa, Bāla, Rudra, Pinākin, Chagalāṇḍa, and Mahākāla are the most common *liṅga* emanations seated in six *cakras*.

18 MVR, pp. 36–37.

19 ŚVT, Chapter 6 (p. 102).

20 ŚVT, Chapter 6 (p. 102); MVR, p. 37.

21 ŚVT, Chapter 6 (p. 102–3); MVR, p. 38.

22 ŚVT, Chapter 6 (p. 103); MVR, p. 39.

23 ŚVT, Chapter 6 (p. 103); MVR, p. 39.

24 ŚVT, Chapter 6 (p. 103); MVR, p. 40.

25 *Puraścaryārṇava* III, 319.

26 All the visualizations in this group are according to Dyczkowski 2009: 192–250, except if mentioned otherwise.

27 Dyczkowski does not detail the weapons of Carcikā. He cites *Jayadrathayāmala*, where the deity is visualized as carrying a skull (Dyczkowski 2009: 247). I have followed Maheśvarānanda's description: *kanthāsulakapālamettavihavaṃ* … | *Mahārthamañjari*, verse 71d.

28 *Puraścaryārṇava* III, 321.

29 *Puraścaryārṇava* III, 323–25.

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30 For detailed analysis of the ritual dimension of Siddhalakṣmī that blends folk and textual deities as well as the deities from the Vaiṣṇavite and the Śaivite tradition, see Timalsina 2006. For the study on Lakṣmī, see Rhodes 2011.
31 The secretive nature of this pantheon has left the scholars in this area out of the loop. For instance, Sanderson (1990: 63–64) writes that he has not encountered this (Siddhalakṣmī) form of Kālasaṅkarṣiṇī either painted or sculpted.
32 For instance, see the stone inscription in the Siddhilakṣmī temple in Patan: *sahasrānakuśā* (sic.) *devī candrikoparisaṃsthitā | tripañcanetrasaṃyuktā daśabāhū mahābalā || pañcānanā mahādevī hārakeyūraśobhitā | divyāmṛtam pibantīm tāṃ siddhipūrvāṃ śriyaṃ numaḥ* || This inscription is dated Newari era 793, which is 1672 C.E.
33 *... kālikākramabandhanīm* || the Patan inscription.
34 *viśvakṣayakṛtam api yat kālakālī karālā* | Pāṭan inscription.
35 *... pāyād vo vajramātā kulakamalavarodbhāsakā siddhikālī* || Pāṭan inscription.
36 *pātu śrīcakrakālī hy abhimataphaladā candrakoṭiprakāśā* || Pāṭan inscription.
37 This follows *Agnikāryapaddhati* and fits with the Kashmiri Image in Pal 1975: 226–27.
38 The visualizations SL_2 to SL_6 follows DM 137_a to 138_b.
39 This visualization follows the image of the Alsdorf collection, Pal 1997.
40 This visualization follows the image of the Jucker collection (Kreijger 1999: 66).
41 This visualization follows the Pāṭan museum Siddhilaksmi image.
42 The arm in the image is missing. Since all the rest of the visualizations have *aṅkuśa,* presumably this Siddhilaksmi also bears *aṅkuśa*.
43 The visualizations of the variants of Siddhalakṣmī listed here follow DM.
44 *Puraścaryārṇava*, vol. 3, page 52.
45 Pal 1997: 214.
46 *śataśīrṣāṃ triṇayanāṃ prativaktraṃ trilocanāṃ | hastadviśatasaṃyuktāṃ svasamākāraśaktibhiḥ || Dhyānamālā* 135 b.
47 The *Dhyānamālā* (DM) cited in this article is based on the manuscript in the author's personal collection.
48 DM 136 a-b.
49 The Microfilm of *Tridaśaḍāmarapratyaṅgirāviṣayakanānātantra* demonstrates the ritual of the Siddhilakṣmī aspect.
50 *mahāpratyaṅgirā kṛṣṇā ṣaḍbhujaikamukhā khaḍgāṅkuśavaradakṣiṇahastā raktapadmatriśūlahṛdaya-sthasapāśatarjanīyuktavāmahastā hūṃbījā akṣobhyamukuṭā sarvālaṅkāravatī rūpayauvanasampannā. Sādhasnamālā*, as cited in Bhattacharyya 1993, 88.
51 Mainly based on the *Sādhanamālā* (op. cit.) and other cognate Tantric texts of rituals.
52 *dhyāyet kalpāntakālāgnilakṣaṇām atibhīṣaṇām | kālālikokilādīninibhāṃ kāntisubhairavām || caturbhujām ekavīrāṃ netratritayabhāsurām | mahāpretasamārūḍhāṃ pātrakhaḍvāṅgadhāriṇīm || pāśamudgarahastān tāṃ vasārudhiralampaṭām | mahogrāṃ mahābhīmāṃ kṣayamārutaniḥsvanām || evaṃ dhyāyen yantranāśe kṛtyākhārkhodamarddane | Dhyānamālā* 138 a.
53 *Dhyānamālā* 138 a-b.
54 The text does not explicitly identify the *mudrā*, but following the pattern of Siddhilakṣmī, it reasonably could be *tarjanī-mudrā*.
55 *daśabāhus trinetrā ca śastrāsiṃ ḍamaruṃ nṛkam | vibhratī dakṣiṇe haste vāme ghaṇṭāṃ ca kheṭakam || khaḍvāṅgañ ca triśūlañ ca siddhacāmuṇḍikāhvayā | siddhayogeśvarī devī sarvasiddhipradāyikā || etadrūpā bhaved anyā pāśāṅkuśayutāruṇā | Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya* (PSS) Vol. I, 112–13.
56 Sanderson 1990: 63–64.
57 *Puraścaryārṇava* (hereafter: PA), vol. 3, page 321.
58 The seed syllable of her *mantra* is identical to that of Yogeśverī. The goddess, when invoked as *tejaḥ-saṅkarṣiṇī* (she who consumes light), resonates of Kālasaṅkarṣiṇī and when addressed as *manthāna* (churner), she reminds the practitioner of

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Manthānabhairava. When she is addressed as *siddhiyoginī,* it resonates of Siddhayogeśvarī. See, *Śrīvidyārṇavatantra,* vol. 1, page 134 (Kak ed.).

59 One of the most common deities visualized with five faces is Gāyatrī. Even the popular god Hanumān comes with five faces that integrate five distinct divinities (Varāha, Garuḍa, Āñjaneya, Narasiṃha, and Hayagrīva). Śiva is often invoked with five faces that combine five Rudra deities Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa, and Īśāna. One of the visualizations of Guhyakālī comes with five faces.

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5 Holographic limbs and metaphoric bodies in Hindu myths

Introduction

This chapter explores the myths from classical Hindu literature that underlie the premise that the body is a hologram, with each part capable of projecting the totality. Holographic cosmology and epistemology give a different perspective in reading images. This helps us contextualize the body in dynamism, the limbs in relation to the body, and above all, the relation of the human body with the cosmos. The worldviews being examined in analyzing Tantric images are primarily monistic in that a singular reality is manifest in the myriad of forms. In this paradigm, even the most basic form retains the ability to mirror the totality. And this premise is not farfetched in light of some contemporary theories. David Bohm maintains that the universe is in some sense a holographic structure, and following the position of Karl Pribram, consciousness relies on holographic structures. These positions deviate from mainstream reductionism and give an alternate and viable scientific explanation of the reality with which we are familiar. The holographic concept of the "whole in every part" gives an entirely alternative perspective to understanding "what-it-is." The argument of this chapter is that this reality as a hologram is founded in our cognitive processes, and the way we conceptualize, remember, or imagine something has a holographic structure. Visualization practice, primarily the culture of images, rests on these assumptions.

David Bohm, relying on the concept that all organisms and forms are holograms and embedded within a universal hologram, argues that the entirety of the universe can be detected from and within each internal part. Following this holographic imagery, the material universe and individual minds merge as dynamic holonomic projections. Ultimate reality in this paradigm is an all-inclusive hologram within which all other dynamic holograms emerge. Some scientists go further and suggest that this ultimate reality is consciousness that is understood as a quantifiable continuum of physical energy, and our relative consciousness is embedded within this comprehensive spectrum.[1] This holographic model to describe reality also helps us understand Leibniz's monadology. In his understanding, "each simple substance has relations which express all the others, and, consequently, that it is a perpetual living mirror of the universe" (Theodicy 130: 360).

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Although social sciences have their own maxims and laws, this alternate model of describing reality can assist us in comprehending the conceptual layout that interweaves Hindu myths and philosophy. The archetypal narrative of Puruṣa (*Ṛgveda* 10.90) describes that a single organism dismembers itself and becomes many, both in terms of subject and objects. The concept central to Advaita philosophy, that Brahman is the singular reality identical to consciousness and the world is projected within it, just like a town reflected in a mirror, echoes the same holographic framework. The Yoga and Tantra philosophy of *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa*, that is, the body is a mirror-image of the universe (lit. the body equates to the cosmos), relies on this same understanding.[2] This philosophy reaches its pinnacle with the notion that there is just one single self (*ekajīva*) that is all witnessing and other minds are merely its projections. Most prominently, the narratives found in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (YV) present the mind as the epicenter wherein the entire cosmos is mirrored and this mind also gives rise to the mirror worlds. Following the paradigm of Vasiṣṭha, each and every mind is independent in creating their own mirror worlds within the mega-projection of Brahmā. Described in terms of *bimba-pratibimba* or the "image and mirror-image," YV's metaphysics proposes that multiple worlds converge.[3] These metaphysical parameters are essential in our understanding of corporeal limbs in Hindu myths, since the same conceptual framework is operational.

Utilizing the concept of implicit and explicit orders from Bohm, mythical order is implicit in the explicit order of our experience. We are accustomed to interpret certain sounds as specific words, and without scanning through possible meanings and syntactic analyses, we come up with its meaning. In the interval between hearing a sound and grasping its correlate entity, multiple processes occur, and it is as if we hear 'things' and not words. We are accustomed to interpret retinal input in the same way. What we think is given through sensory modalities that have already been interpreted by our consciousness, and what we have is a ritualized form of experience. This paper proposes that the process of myth making underlies the same conceptual framework. Myths, in this understanding, are the product of a higher-order consciousness that superimposes meaning to given sensory responses in order to address our existential concerns. By reliving myths, rituals unpack the underlying conceptual categories, allowing subjects to transform their experience and relive past experiences.

Unlike the holographic process where only the image is fragmented and observed, myths blend and merge two objects and create one image. It is commonplace in Hindu myths that multiple deities integrate their bodies within a single image and thus merge their identities. The image of Ardhanārīśvara or of Harihara exemplifies an integration of two different subjects. In the first, a couple occupies a single body, and in the second, two subjects with distinct and sometimes conflicting roles merge in a single body. The Tantric ritual of *maṇḍala* offerings displays the same principle where the movement of deities from the external to inner circles of a *maṇḍala* highlights the process

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wherein deities blend and merge into a singular form. While this integration of different subjects into one is a widely distributed phenomenon, many examples demonstrate the reverse, where a single deity emanates as many. This transformation occurs either with a single deity assuming multiple forms to carry out different roles, or with the deity manifesting in different forms from various limbs of her central image. For example, Viṣṇu emanates in the form of a *maṇḍala* with the fourfold divinities of Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, and this emanation reflects various roles of the deity.

Two goddess myths can be used to describe the generic process of many other similar emanation narratives. In the narrative of Satī, the goddess Satī, consort of Śiva, immolates herself in the fire-altar of Dakṣa. When Śiva carries her body and roams around the Indian sub-continent, the limbs of the goddess fall to earth and each and every limb turns into the goddess, defining that space as a sacred site (*pīṭha*). The prominent fifty centers of goddess worship throughout the continent, following this myth, represent different parts of Satī that manifest as deities on their own. In the ritual reversal of this myth, all the deities return to their primordial form, essentially regaining the original body. In order to recreate this myth, rituals break space into tangible parts and assign these to various deities. The ritual prominence and concentration of the center suggests the revival of the original body of Satī. In this context, the myth of Satī is also noteworthy for two additional reasons. When outraged by the demise of Satī, Śiva pulls out his hair and from two strands the gods Vīrabhadra and Bhadrakālī emerge. They eventually destroy the sacrifice of Dakṣa. In the same myth, Śiva revives Dakṣa by affixing a goat-head to his torso. The plasticity and holographic nature of the body is vivid in these examples.

There are wider mythical similarities with regard to the regenerative nature of the body, and these parallels are crucial to the present discourse on understanding the holographic body. In the narrative of Rāmāyaṇa, the protagonist Rāma is barely able to conquer Rāvaṇa because every time his head is severed, a new head regenerates. Likewise, in the Greek myth, Hercules faces the same dilemma in his battle with Hydra. In another myth, the heart of Prometheus regenerates every morning, having been devoured by eagles during the night.

It is not only the case that parts can recreate their unitary whole, there are also myths to suggest that various bodies can merge to become one and acquire a singular identity. The myth of Durgā, one of the most popular Śākta myths, confirms that the divine body is but a constellation of multiple divinities. Just like the goddess manifests out of the energies of various gods, she splits herself into two as Kālikā and Kauśikī, assuming the roles of isolation from, and engagement with the world. She becomes many, in the form of Mātṛkā goddesses and eventually these manifestations return to her primordial form. Myths articulate the manifestations in two different ways. In the first, the goddess emanates or splits into multiple forms and this process is

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described by the term *vibhava.* In the second, the goddess descends (*ava*+√*tṛ*) among humankind in the form of Kauśikī, Śākambharī, and so on. In both ways, the primordial body is comparable to the clay that can be shaped into various forms. These manifestations are spatio-temporally conditioned, with each image related to mythical time and space.

Select examples suffice to demonstrate that Hindu literature since classical times follows a holographic model to describe reality. By applying the cognitive processes of metaphor, metonymy, and conceptual integration, corporeal limbs in these depictions display the totality and represent the total body. The status of *liṅga* and *yoni* in Hindu myths and rituals as Śiva and Śakti, for instance, describes the same mirroring process wherein the corporeal limbs represent the deity. In Tantric visualization, the feet of a precept stand for the guru, and the sandals of guru are revered as the preceptor himself. In a Rāmāyaṇa narrative, Bharata rules Ayodhyā under the presence of Rāma's sandals, where the metonymic association of the sandals to feet and the holographic representation of the feet to the complete human body is given.

In order to limit the scope of this paper, I will explore the significance of the eyes and ears, the tongue, hair, and genitals in light of their mirroring and holographic properties. What is common to these limbs is that every act of consciousness through the engagement of these senses of seeing, hearing, and touching confirms the complete awareness of an object, no matter how fractured the awareness is in the process of cognition. This is to say that the epistemic process of creating the whole in order to cognize entities reflects the cosmic principle of holographic reality.

Eyes, perception, and hologram

Three features of the eyes warrant our attention. The mythical construction of the gaze, its philosophical reduction, and the application of eyes in popular culture cannot be isolated from one another. Indian myths repeatedly confirm the power of the gaze, and subjective philosophies reducing reality to consciousness utilize metaphors related to the eye to describe reality. 'Seeing,' a metonymic extension of eyes, is used across cultures as synonymous to knowing. The way the mythical images gives primacy to the eyes demonstrates the centrality of vision in our experience.

Since ancient times, human beings have conceived of the sun as an entity witnessing with his eyes.[4] The number of eyes is crucial to this discourse: the sun is depicted either as an 'eye' or as casting eyes to witness the world events. When used in the singular, the sun is an eye and seeing becomes identical to its organ and the subject. When shown with multiple eyes, the sun manifests the organs of perception in the rays, and this imagery crucially demonstrates the Indian philosophy of perception. Seeing, in classical India, is primarily understood as the process in which the eyes, reach out through the rays to an entity of perception, transform into the shape of the entity being cognized, and the 'sense' of this perception is then returned to the mind. Perception, in

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this depiction, breaks the boundary between the subject and object: there is an actual inter-penetration in the mode of experience.

No perception is partial or incomplete. Our notion of 'part,' such as the branch of a tree, is conceptual. Based on sensory input, higher-order consciousness provides a structure of reality that reflects reality in its collective sense. The non-dual philosophers maintain that what is immediately given to our experience is being (*sattā*) or the highest universal (*mahā-sāmānya*), and this applies to all modes of awareness, no matter how fragmentary. Congruent to our discussion, Hindus believe that the witnessing aspect of consciousness (represented by eyes) cannot be reduced.

Across cultures, consciousness is equated with 'seeing' and metonymically linked to the eyes. The cultural understanding of eyes relies on metaphors such as "*seeing is knowing*," "*seeing is touching*," or "*seeing is being seen*," and metonymy, where the eyes stand for seeing. Although embodied experiences share some universal traits, not all metaphors of eyes can be universalized.[5] As Yu (2001) points out, the primacy of seeing with eyes is vivid in examples such as seeing for oneself is better than hearing about it from others. Eyes represent the entire face and give an individual his identity. This understanding presupposes the metonymy "*the part stands for whole.*" Just like in Indian culture perception is considered to be the meeting of the rays of the eyes with the object, seeing is often depicted in Chinese in terms of a ray of light traveling from the eyes to the target. Yu (2004: 667) explains that the light moving through space in the process of seeing has force, "it has a sharp point, as it were, that can penetrate like a dagger." The underlying conceptual metaphor is "*seeing is touching.*" This metaphor is also active in the Tantric ritual of *dṛg dīkṣā*, the initiation through the gaze of the master that penetrates into the subtle body of the disciple. At a deeper level, the metaphor is, "*mental function is perceptual experience*," and this relies on the assumption that we can see with the eye of the mind. It can be expanded to the metaphors, "*thinking, knowing, or understanding is seeing.*"

Universally, eyes stand for seeing and they have primacy over other sensory faculties. While this is the case, cultural experiences of eyes and the metaphors and metonymies that emerge from these experiences cannot be reduced, based on some common traits. Yu (2004: 675) points out that big eyes stand for arrogance in Chinese culture. In Indian culture, big eyes recur as a pattern in many images, and various glares and glances are linked with different emotional states. One deity is invoked as Viśālā, the big eyed one. Bhairava's glaring eyes are also known as the Bhairavī *mudrā*, the gesture in which the gaze is outside while awareness is focused within. His exaggerated gaze is not focused on any object: the paradox depicts the harmony of transcendence and immanence. Bigger eyes here are describing a higher level of awareness.

Having a vision is considered a creative act. For Levin (1988: 226–27), creative vision "makes connections, it gathers and unifies, it joins, it creates, it reproduces and multiplies; it is, in a word, erotic. Vision, being inherently metaphorical, responds primarily to things with a gaze very different from the

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literal gaze of the scientific eye." In Indian philosophy, a similar concept is described in terms of *dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi*.[6] One of the interpretations of this term is that creation is identical to seeing. This seeing, in the Indian context, also refers to self-awareness, and the same concept also describes the dissolution of differences at the level of the meta-gaze of the self.

In visualization, eyes stand for the transcendental and all-encompassing gaze. The act of seeing possesses by its nature witnessing consciousness (*sākṣin*), the disinterested observer that does not involve itself in the modes of events. This seeing participates in the worldly processes, with confined vision. *Darśan*, or seeing the divine, becomes the inter-subjective gaze, as the viewer is in fact anticipating the divine glance.[7] Since the deities have multiple visions, they possess multiple eyes. In the ritual 'installation of life' (*prāṇapratiṣṭhā*) that enlivens images for temple worship, opening the eyes is the final act.[8] The image is believed to be fully present and alive when the eyes are opened. While eyes and the gaze refer to consciousness, the opening of the eyes clearly indicates the presence of the deity.

In images, the eyes represent the irreducible self. There are many instances, particularly in the Kathmandu valley, where a deity is depicted by only his eyes. Seeing these eyes represents the mutual gaze, a fusion of seeing. Along the same lines, seeing possesses power. When translated, the term *citiśakti* means the 'power of consciousness' and when consciousness is equated with vision, this results in the power of vision. To see something is to have power over it and to be seen is to surrender one's primacy to the perceiving subject.

Figure 5.1 Bhairava

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This power of seeing is often depicted in the erotic gaze of the nymphs that overpowers the seers or the wrathful gaze of Śiva that incinerates Kāma, the embodiment of passionate desire. The third eye of Śiva, his wrathful gaze, is depicted as golden, suggesting its fiery nature. The third eye or the mind's eye, when manifest in images, turns into a powerful gaze that engulfs the visual field. Many fearsome deities such as Kālī or Bhairava are depicted with the third eye. While the metaphor of "*seeing is creating*" is sustained in cultural application, the destructive gaze is central to various Tantric images. The deities with a third eye are often associated with liberation, as the destruction of illusion and emergence of wisdom are identical. Further expanding the power of vision, the ritual application of the 'gaze of lion' (*siṃhāvalokana*) describes the intense command and the radiant energy of the *siddhas*. This gaze removes outer impurities and grants oneness with the deity. The goddess likewise imbues the *maṇḍala* with power by the same gaze. Through its power, the *siddhas* can send individuals to the highest planes of existence (Dyczkowski 2009: 48–49). This power of seeing, when embodied by lower spirits or humans, turns into the 'evil eye' that can cause negative events. Seeing thus can be the simple witnessing of the disinterested self, the phenomenal perception, or the enlivening or incinerating gaze. In all instances, the subject or what it stands for, has been synthesized in the gaze.

In Sanskrit, the term *akṣa* originally refers to the eye, and it also stands for sense organs in general. This is how direct eye contact can represent all modes of sensory perception. Just as eyes stand for perception, a function carried out by five sensory organs, seeing stands for all forms of sensory awareness: to see is also to hear or to touch. Similarly, the eyes differentiate between the world 'outside' and the self, 'inside.' The eyes are the *bandhu* that bridges two different realms.

In images, eyes possess a number of striking features: 1) They are proportionally bigger. 2) The divine body often possesses more than two eyes, primarily three. The physical eyes depict the finite gaze, as it is confined in time. Classical texts parallel two eyes with the sun and the moon, the indicators of time. Kṛṣṇa bestows the 'divine eye' upon Arjuna that allows him to directly perceive the Viśvarūpa, the all-encompassing form of Kṛṣṇa.[9] This eye transcends the modes of time, as what Arjuna sees with it includes events that are about to occur. 3) Sometimes even the weapons are adorned with eyes, such as the sword of Kālī.

The mythical depiction of deities brings eyes to prominence. Some deities are depicted as having eyes over their entire body, beginning with the myth of Puruṣa endowed with one thousand eyes. The myth of Indra describes his transgression that leads to the curse of having a thousand vulvas and the transformation of those into one thousand eyes.[10] Many other Vedic gods possess multiple eyes, including Varuṇa,[11] Rudra,[12] and Agni[13] who are praised as each having one thousand eyes. Tantras sustain this centrality of eyes in visualization. Two deities with prominent eye features are Śatākṣī, the goddess with one hundred eyes, and Mīnākṣī, the goddess with fish-eyes.[14]

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The name Śatākṣī is suggestive, as she watches over sages with her many eyes, granting protection. In these depictions, to be seen is also to be protected.

In one Śaiva myth, the eye of Viṣṇu substitutes for the lotus.[15] Śiva transforms Viṣṇu's eye into the discus, 'good vision' (Sudarśana). Three entities are shifted as interchangeable in this myth where the eye is equated with a lotus that turns into a disk. The metaphoric depiction of eyes with lotus and disk stems from the characteristics of the eyes and gaze as both watery and fiery.

The power of vision

As discussed above, Indian culture in general maintained that perception actually touches the object. Following this paradigm, the outward flow of energies in the act of perception is shared by all who see or cognize. Deities, spirits, and ascetics, however, possess vision with higher powers: they can transform reality through their sight. This can be demonstrated in the *Mahābhārata* narratives. For example, Gāndhārī asks her son Duryodhana, who is about to lose the battle against the Pāṇḍavas, to expose his body in front of her. Due to her vow to keep herself blindfolded, she has gained the power to transform reality. Duryodhana, due to modesty, does not remove his undergarment when answering her request. Gāndhārī opens her eyes and castes her gaze, making Duryodhana's body invincible, except for his groin covered with his loincloth. His groan becomes his Achille's heel, allowing Bhīma to kill him in battle. At the end of the battle, when Yudhiṣṭhira asks Gāndhārī for her forgiveness, Gāndhārī turns her face away, with fear that she may burn down the prince with her gaze. Her gaze accidentally falls on his toe and burns it immediately.

The eyes and consequently sight embody various moods and magical powers. *Saundaryalaharī* (verse 49) describes eight different looks of the goddess Tripurā, comparing them with eight cities of classical India. Following the text, her glance is all-pervasive and so is identified as *viśālā* [lit. big]; her gaze showers prosperity and is identified as *kalyāṇī* [lit. auspicious]; her brilliant vision is invincible and so is called *ayodhyā* [lit. invincible]; it is identified as the fountainhead (*dhārā*) of compassion; due to its indescribable sweetness, it is called *madhurā* [lit. sweet]; with enjoying bliss, this gaze is identified as *bhogavatī* [lit. bestowing enjoyment]; through protection of devotees, this sight is called *avantī* [lit. protecting]; due to its victorious nature, this is identified as *vijayā* [lit. victorious]. Thus the poet carefully establishes a correspondence between eight Indian cities and the gaze of the goddess. What has been suggested here is eight different *rasas*.

At the esoteric level, these glances depict eight different functions of the goddess. Following Lakṣmīdhara, the first glance, identified as *viśālā*, describes the inward blooming aspect of the gaze of the goddess that brings excitement. The next gaze identified as *kalyāṇī*, the gaze of astonishment, is correlated with attraction. Her dilated pupils, *ayodhyā*, indicate fright. Her sluggish look (*dhārā*) suggests the intoxicating power of her gaze. Described

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as a slightly swirling gaze (*madhurā*), the glance of the goddess brings control. Her friendly glance (*bhogavatī*) subdues the enemy. Her innocent look (*avantī*) is described as causing enmity, and her half-closed eye (*vijayā*) causes death. Explicit in these depictions is the magical effect of the glance.

Multiple sources detail the power of the gaze to materialize reality. Prominent among them is the initiation through gaze, *dṛg-dīkṣā*. In this ritual, the sight of the preceptor flows through his eyes and touches the heart, or sometimes, enters into the base *cakra* of the disciple, thus granting wisdom. By bestowing a glance upon his disciple, the master enters his body. Babb identifies some terms utilized in the discourse, such as "the current of seeing," "turning" the pupils of the eyes, to "reverse" this current, "mixing" the sight, "flow of seeing," or sight compared to "waves."[16] This depiction complements the philosophy of perception discussed above. This flow of sight is compared to the flow of water through a channel that goes to the field and takes the shape of the field, whether triangular or square.[17] This description utilizes the metaphor of soaking: just like water soaks the field, so do the eyes. In SL 57, the author asks the goddess to 'bathe' him with her gaze.

Seeing, a function of the eyes, is often a metaphor for creating: the act of seeing is parallel to the process of creation. Then, the absence of seeing, closing of eyes, is compared to destruction (SL 55–56). The connotation of *unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa*, the opening and closing of eyes, describes the process of revealing and concealing the world.[18] These two aspects of opening and closing the eyes are also compared to the blooming and wilting of a lotus, describing day and night (SL 57).

When the deities are depicted with three eyes, they demonstrate three different aspects of time: day with the right eye, night with the left eye, and twilight with the third eye (SL 48). Since three modes of time are embodied by the deity, she transcends time. The triadic depiction of eyes culminates in SL 53, with the three eyes of Tripurā describing the perfect balance of white, red, and dark, signifying three *guṇas*. These are also linked with three rivers (SL 54), suggesting the three channels of the subtle body. *Netratantra* epitomizes the symbolism of eyes, with three eyes of Śiva describing the triadic universe and the threefold functions of Śiva. Three eyes of Śiva relate to the sun, moon, and fire.

The glance of the deity is not confined, as is everyday seeing. Since deities are omniscient, their eyes reflect the totality. In poetic depiction, the eyes identify the varied acts that the deity carries out: the glance of the deity includes all that exists; it is supposed to shower prosperity; the divine gaze is invincible; it is compassionate; it is sweet; it is blissful; it is protecting; and it is victorious (SL 49). These eight different attributes correlate with differing functions, which in turn represent the eight aesthetic moods (*rasas*) (SL 50–51).

The organs of speech

The tongue, the source of speech, is mythically and symbolically interlinked with the ears, the receptor of speech. The tongue metonymically suggests its

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various functions: to consume, taste, articulate word and sound, and communicate. The Vedic seers related the consuming nature of fire with mantric speech, and with the tongue, which then becomes the metaphor for flame and eventually for the fire-altar. In *Ṛgveda*, Agni is invoked with flames described as tongues,[19] and the same text identifies the three 'tongues' of Agni.[20] These tongues explicitly refer to three different fire altars. This earlier metaphor of tongue evolves into that of a head, with fire as a deity having three heads. Deities are often equated with *mantras* and are depicted as sitting on the tongue of the speaker. Two aspects of speech, hearing and articulating, are depicted in the Vedas as *śruti* and *mantra,* where the first is passively received and the second is potent and fiery. Tantras describe a similar phenomenon in terms of *mantra* and *vidyā* being male and female.

The metaphor of tongue further evolves, with some deities emerging from another deity's tongue. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* describes Agni as having seven tongues, identified as Kālī, Karālī, and so on.[21] Noteworthy is the transformation of the tongue of fire to the goddess Kālī, often depicted with her tongue outstretched. This exaggerated gesture overshadows the rest of her body: Kālī becomes the tongue itself. The Krama texts describe Vāmeśvarī as the one who instigates creation; she is called Vāmā as she vomits out the world. The ritual association of Kālī with left-hand practices (*vāmācāra*) and her affiliation with Vāmeśvarī describe the same phenomenon. In visualization, Kālī is usually surrounded by flames. Although the connection of fire with speech is not explicit in the Kālī imagery, she is sometimes depicted as Vāc, the goddess of speech.[22]

The graphic depiction of Kālī's tongue has drawn various speculations in contemporary scholarship. Kinsley posits that the lolling tongue of the goddess suggests her great appetite for blood. In his words, "she is famished and extends her tongue grossly to satisfy her huge appetite, which is all-consuming" (Kinsley 1998: 81). While the description of Kālī as eternally devouring and all-consuming parallels the Tantric depiction of Kālī, specifically the Bhadrakālī form of the goddess, the suggestion that the outstretched tongue symbolizes a thirst for blood is hard to reconcile, since the common gesture of consumption does not feature the tongue in this manner. Kripal (1994: 152–89) argues that Kālī's tongue symbolizes sexual gratification, again without any reference and supporting argument.

While the tongue, an internal body part, is prominently featured in imagery, clearly visible ears are often absent. The unremarked presence of ears and the emphasis on eyes suggest the primacy of 'seeing' over 'hearing.' This subordination of ears and thus hearing is parallel to the Tantric depiction of *śruti* as secondary to direct apprehension. In imagery, then, ears serve an ornamental purpose.

Ears in myths often signify the womb. Two demons Madhu and Kaiṭava emerge from the ears of Viṣṇu, and Kuntī gives birth to Karṇa through her ear. The ears of Kumbhakarṇa resemble pitchers, as his name suggests. Pitchers have a long affiliation with the womb in symbolism, with sages such

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Figure 5.2 Kālī

as Droṇa or human beings (the Kaurava family) being born of a pitcher. Sage Agastya is also addressed as Kumbhaja (born of a pitcher). The relationship of pitcher with the womb is vivid in these myths.

Ears are linked with both hearing and comprehension. In both cases, ears relate to linguistic mode of realization. To listen is thus not just to receive the words, as listening is transformative. Ears thus become the metaphor for the attentive aspect of consciousness.

Noteworthy is the symbolism of earrings. For instance, Naṭarāja wears on his right ear a 'crocodile-ring' (*makara-kuṇḍala*), alluding to his skills in dance. His left earlobe bears the *tāṭaṅka* ring, usually a feminine adornment, that highlights his beauty. Śiva is also known as Ardhanārīśvara, the Lord who is half-woman. The Naṭarāja image with two different ornaments that are associated with the two genders depicts this androgynous nature. Some goddesses, such as the *nirvāṇa* form of Tripurasundarī, wear the sun and the moon as two earrings. Haṭha yoga texts commonly identify the sun and moon with Īḍā and Piṅgalā, the left and right channels.

Earrings are often used to indicate the lineage of the wearer. Just as the sun is shown wearing earrings, so also is Karṇa, his son. As Bhairava and Kālī wear earrings made of human skulls, so also do Kāpālikas. Both Śiva and his followers, particularly the Nātha Siddhas, wear big earrings. The earrings, *kuṇḍala*, and the serpentine power, *kuṇḍalinī*, appear interlinked in this

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symbolism. Congruent with this argument, some Kālī images with two snakes as her earrings likewise suggest *kuṇḍalinī*. In another example, the rings of Tripurā are compared to the wheels of the chariot of Kāma (SL 59). These rings clearly depict the centrality of the symbolism of circularity in Hindu myths.

Liṅga and Yoni

Due to its polysemic nature, the term *liṅga* is highly misunderstood. Derived from the root √*ligi* in the meaning of 'motion,' the term *liṅga* refers to both 'sign' (*cihna*) and the male genitals.[23] In Indian logic, this term describes the directly apprehended object that infers what is unseen. For example, in the syllogism 'if P then Q,' P is a *liṅga*.[24] When the Purāṇic and Tantric literature utilize this term, they are exploiting this polysemic nature, and while their source is the physical limb, particularly the phallus of Śiva, the target meaning is something indirect.

In the context of images, the term *liṅga* specifically signifies the divine presence. Categorized into three, the 'unmanifest sign' (*avyakta liṅga*) refers to any uncarved object in which the presence of the divine is accepted. The 'manifest and unmanifest sign' (*vyaktāvyakta liṅga*) relates to half-carved images.

Figure 5.3 Śivaliṅga

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In this, only the face of the deity may be visible. This symbol suggests the interpenetration of the transcendent and the immanent. All images of the deities are identified by the term, 'manifest signs' (*vyakta liṅga*). A sign, accordingly, is that through which its referent is recognized.[25] The foremost sign of the transcendent is the very world,[26] as its presence makes transcendence possible. Since the manifest body is its sign, the ultimate is then 'signless' (*aliṅga*).[27] The myth of the separation of *liṅga* from Śiva describes the process of Śiva transcending his creation.[28] This also indicates that a sign and what it stands for are distinguished in the process of cognition, although the sign resides with the sign-holder in the beginning, before the concepts arise. Bhartṛhari confirms this concept when he establishes the non-duality of the word and its manifestation, meaning. When the world is identified with the sign, *prakṛti,* the primordial nature and the procreative force, is described as *liṅga.*[29] Accordingly, Śiva's castration suggests pure consciousness isolated from *prakṛti,* the state of *kaivalya* in the Sāṅkhya paradigm.

The concept that *liṅga* is the sign of the divine is described in multiple ways. *Skandapurāna* describes space as the signifier (*liṅga*) of the divine, since it is space into which all dissolves.[30] In this way, anything that stands for something else can be called *liṅga,* and thus the fire or the arrow that successively stands for destructive force and lust can be considered the signs for those superimposed functions (Daniélou 1964: 228–29). This 'sign' metonymically stands for the signholder when *liṅga* describes the phallus of Śiva.[31] Likewise, the womb of the goddess stands for the goddess, the procreative force, and *prakṛti.* Thus, the *Liṅga-pīṭha,* with a womb being the seat for *liṅgam,* is a simple metaphor that describes the transcendence of the self over matter, while residing in it. Kramrisch interprets the vertical posture of the *liṅga* as a symbol of ascent that points to heaven and the regions beyond (Kramrisch 1988: 180). The vertical form of *liṅga* also suggests the yogic power of retaining semen. The Caṇḍeśvara image of Śiva is found in iconic form with his erect phallus.

The myth of the manifestation of Liṅga confirms the same tendency of resolving the tension between two polarities: when Viṣṇu and Brahmā boast over their power, the Liṅga manifests itself and asks them to find its beginning and end, which these deities fail to do. The setting of the myth is the tension between the gods of creation and sustenance. The manifestation of the 'sign' is the turning point. The failure of the gods to find its two poles describes the limit within which the tension emerges. The somberness of the gods, the loss of ego, and the rise of the awareness of a higher entity, is the climax of the narrative. Dissolving difference is the essence of the myth.

Just like *liṅga* is associated with manifest bodies, entities that can suggest something else, *yoni* relates to speech. The binary symbolism of *liṅga* and *yoni* parallels the relationship between *vāc* and *artha,* or speech and reference. Tantric texts play on the polysemic nature of the term when they use *yoni,* and use it in one literal meaning while suggesting something else. Tantric texts exploit the polysemy of a triangle facing downward as *yoni* and the

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vowel 'e' in the Śāradā script having the same form, allowing the connection between speech and *yoni*. The syllable '*aim*' is considered as 'originated of speech' (*vāgbhava*), the seed *mantra* of Sarasvatī, the goddess of wisdom. *Devībhāgavata* (3.11) glorifies this *mantra* with a narrative where Satyavrata, an illiterate sage, becomes a poet by accidentally pronouncing this syllable. Tantras identify the syllable 'e' as the origin of all *mantras*.[32]

Hair: the corporeal boundary

There have been substantive studies on hair and I do not intend to elaborate upon a trans-cultural significance that has been addressed in earlier works. For cultural and psychological significance of hair, the studies of Leach (1958), Berg (1951), and Obeyesekere (1981) are immensely helpful. One of the noteworthy observations of Obeyesekere is the distinction between public and private symbols, placing matted hair in the second category.[33] While these observations are broadly correct, what has been missing is a text-historical approach in deciphering meaning. This discourse also addresses the holographic nature of hair symbolism in classical India.

Hair defines the boundary of the body. This boundary is flexible, as it can grow, unlike other aspects of the body, without proportion. It can be removed; and particularly among human beings, some can have more, and others, less. Due to its ephemerality, it has been often discarded in the explicit order of meaning. However, its implicit significance comes to the fore when we explore its cultural significance. What defines the vitality of the body lies not at its center alone but in its peripheral limit, the boundary that defines being.

Hair in classical India has remained a defining feature of the societal boundary. A householder would generally carry a tuft. Although no longer in practice, male Brahmin householders are supposed to keep different numbers of tufts to suggest their specific lineages.[34] Traditionally, women would keep their hair uncut, particularly unshaved, except if they were the widows. If one is a monk following the order of *varṇa* and *āśrama*, he would shave his head (*muṇḍin*). The hermits who have transgressed the orthodox dharma codes would keep matted hair (*jaṭin*). In all these contexts, the societal body is defined and codified by hair. The distinction between *jaṭin* and *muṇḍin*, or the matted hair and shaved head, in this socio-historical context, cannot be deciphered merely as a public or private sign. Matted hair in the historical context relates to transgression, stemming from the practices of the Śramaṇas and Ājīvikas. The Kāpālikas and Aghorins with matted hair transgress social boundaries, and their chief deity, Bhairava or Kālī, has disheveled and upward-facing hair.

In classical India, householders from three *varṇas* kept their tuft, identified by the term *śikhā*. The polysemic nature of the term is explicit; it stands for both a flame of fire as well as the uncut tuft of hair. The *śikhā*, being associated with fire, gives the hair-tuft an additional meaning of the inner fire of

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the Kuṇḍalinī. The tuft also provides a social symbol that indicates a particular ancestry. Based on these presuppositions, we can infer that private and public symbols are not mutually exclusive. The religious significance of hair is vivid, whether the hair is shaved, matted, or a tuft. While having a *śikhā* indicates the maintenance of fire rituals, the other two forms relate to renunciation. While the monks with shaved heads refrain from keeping fire, the wanderers with matted hair maintain fire. In contemporary India, Sādhus maintain their personal fire altar called *dhunī* and this is one of their distinguishing features. In all contexts, matted hair is associated with the practice of yoga. Unlike the monks of the order of Śaṅkara with their shaved heads, these yogins are not required to be celibate.

There is a subtle link of hair to life in these cultural depictions. The hermits who practice Haṭha-yoga, Tantra, or other forms of esotericism keep hair and aspire for long life. The monks who shave their head conduct a death ritual for themselves when taking the vow of renunciation. The same applies to widows who are considered half dead, as they are considered the 'left-limb' (*vāmāṅga*). During the death ritual or in the memory of the deceased father, the mourner shaves his head.

In the depiction of deities, the most noteworthy hairstyles are those of Kālī and Bhairava. Kālī leaves her hair loose and disheveled while Bhairava's hair is stiffly erect. Myths link Śiva with Bhairava: as Śiva he has matted hair, but as Bhairava he has his hair facing upward and of tawny color (*piṅga-keśa*), suggesting flames. This Bhairava depiction again relates the origin of Kālī to the tongue of fire. Most of the visualizations of Kālī, particularly those of Guhyakālī, are placed within the circle of fire, further confirming her association with fire. The upward-facing hair indicates reversal of the natural order, as long hair normally hangs down. This reversal suggests the upward flow of semen (*ūrdhvaretas*), as both Bhairava and his followers are addressed by this term.

Kinsley presents two possible interpretations of Kālī's hair that both relate to the Indian social imagination of feminine norms.[35] According to one, braided hair demonstrates a confirmation of social norms, while following the next, unbound hair demonstrates pollution, shown by the loosened hair of menstruating women. While both understandings are congruent in the Smārta paradigm, these interpretations violate hermeneutic parameters by adopting Smārta categories to interpret Tantric imagery. Smārta appropriation can nevertheless be found even among practitioners, as the shift of symbol in the case of Kālī demonstrates her domestication by Smārta householders.

Also noteworthy in this context is a lock of golden hair in Viṣṇu's left breast that has its own name, Śrīvatsa. This hair bundle is considered to be the source of the natural world and of the primordial causal element *prakṛti* (*Viṣṇupurāṇa* 1.22.69). Śrīvatsa becomes the signifier of Viṣṇu in subsequent literature (GTU 53). Two different meanings of the lock of hair are vivid in these myths. In the first depiction, Viṣṇu carries it; the hairlock becomes the describer, and Viṣṇu embodies *prakṛti*. In the second depiction, the body-part,

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in this case a golden lock, replaces the body of Viṣṇu. In either case, hair stands for the world that is the outgrowth of the god's body.

Crucial to this discussion, hair can manifest as individuals. In his rage at the demise of Satī, Śiva rips out some of his matted hair and it transforms into Vīrabhadra and Bhadrakālī. Other sources suggest that Vīrabhadra was created from the brow of Śiva.[36] As discussed earlier, the tongue of fire is identified with Kālī, while this myth relates Kālī to the hair of Śiva. When enraged, Śiva transforms into Bhairava. The myths relating to the hair of Viṣṇu demonstrate a similar tendency: when the gods tormented by demons praise Viṣṇu, he plucks two hairs from his head that incarnate as two brothers Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma (Zimmer 1992: 81). In the Deccan myth of Khaṇḍoba, we find the same tendency: enraged upon hearing the news that the demons are tormenting the sages, Śiva plucks out by the root a lock (*jaṭā*) of hair and throws it onto the fire altar. The sages then offer ghee and the smoke coming out of the burnt hair commingled with ghee gives birth to the monstrous Mahāmārī.[37]

Around the end of the *Mahābhārata* war, Droṇin goes to kill all the Pāṇḍavas in their beds but mistakenly kills their sons. Enraged with this, Arjuna captures Droṇin and brings him in front of Draupadī, the mother of the children, for execution. In the dilemma of what punishment shall be given to this baby-killer, the Pāṇḍavas decide to cut the tuft (*śikhā*) off his head. In their understanding, this punishment was equivalent to killing him.

Explicit in these depictions is the mirroring capacity of the limbs, although the emanations are subordinate and not as powerful as the source. Śiva's or Viṣṇu's manifestations, coming out of hair, eventually return back to the primordial form of Śiva or Viṣṇu. When viewing the divine body as a *maṇḍala*, the deities in the periphery can be compared to the hairs. Hair is thus both the boundary and the body, the borderline. Due to this nature, hair is often conceived of as polluting.

Conclusion

Mythical and Tantric ritual conceptualizations regarding the body demonstrate the plasticity of the body in the Indian cultural imagination. Even the yogic concept of *siddhis*, or the meta-natural powers of becoming atomic or having a giant body, relies on this plasticity. The holographic nature of the limbs, particularly the divine ones, is exploited in the Tantric *maṇḍalas*, as the deities in the periphery of a *maṇḍala* are described as the limbs of the central deity.

Language has often been excluded from the discourse on the body. This discussion contextualizes that language lies at the core of cultural constructs and linguistic ambivalence is at the foundation of cultural misappropriation. Every term applied to describe the corporeal limbs describe more than merely signifying the body-parts. This linguistic significance comes to the climax with

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terms such as *liṅga*, where lexicographers exploit the highest potential of these terms. Holographic limbs best describe the process of myth and image making, where limbs, besides being the center of attention and of discourse, replicate the entire image and stand as an independent subject.

Notes

1 For discussion, see Germine 2007.
2 For discussions on this concept, see Timalsina 2008, 2009.
3 For an esthetic application of the classical theory of image and counter-image (*bimba-pratibimba*), see Lawrence 2005.
4 For the symbolism of eyes, see Fingesten 1970: 37–51.
5 Yu 2001.
6 For discussion on *dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi*, see Timalsina 2006.
7 Noteworthy in this context are Eck 1981 and Babb 1981.
8 For discussion of this ritual, see Davis 1997.
9 *Bhagavadgītā* 11.8.
10 Indra as *sahasra-muṣka* or having one thousand testicles is found in the *Ṛgveda* (ṚV) 8.19.32.
11 ṚV 7.34.10; *Atharvavedasaṃhitā* 4.16.4. For discussion, see Srinivasan 1978: 193–225.
12 ĀVS 2.2.3, 7, 17.
13 ṚV 10.79.5; 1.79.12.
14 For further metaphor for the eyes of the goddess compared to female-fish, see SL 56.
15 Puṣpadanta narrates this myth in his *Mahimnastava,* verse 19. For discussion on the lotus, see Zimmer 1992: 90–102.
16 Babb 1981: 391.
17 This discussion on perception relies on the Advaita definition of perception found in the *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*. For the study on this theory of perception, see Gupta 1995.
18 *Spandakārikā* 1.
19 ṚV 2.1.13; 3.6.2.
20 ṚV 3.20.2
21 *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* 1.2.4. This passage can be considered one of the early references to indicate seven goddesses, making a clear link with fire.
22 See the Rajasthani painting found in Mookerjee 1988: 18.
23 Amarasiṃha identifies these two meanings in his lexicography: ... *liṅgaṃ cihnaśephaso* || *Amarakoṣa* 3.3.25d.
24 See: *liṅgaṃ cihne 'numāne ca sāṅkhyoktaprakṛtāv api | śivamūrtiviśeṣe ca mehane 'pi ṇapuṃsakam* || *Medinīkoṣa* 23.21cd-22ab.
25 *Śivapurāṇa,* for instance, describes *liṅga* as "the sign through which the reference assigned to the sign is recognized" (*Śivapurāṇa* 1.16.106).
26 *vigraho jagatāṃ liṅgam ... Śivapurāṇa* 1.3.3.
27 *Liṅgapurāṇa* 1.3.2–3.
28 *Kūrma Purāṇa* 2.38.39–41. For discussions, see O'Flaherty 1981: 132.
29 *Liṅgapurāṇa* 1.17.5.
30 Cited in Daniélou 1964: 228.
31 *Liṅgapurāṇa* 1.16.106–7.
32 For discussion on this syllable, see *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava* 1.6, and the commentaries of Śivānanda and Vidyānanda thereon; *Netratantra* 7.40; *Tantrāloka* 3.94–95.
33 Obeyesekere in Lambek 2002: 383–97. See also Hiltebeitel and Miller (eds) 1998.
34 The way *śikhā* used to be kept signified the specific family lineage, *pravara.* For instance, those having five *pravaras* would have five tufts and three tufts for those

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having three *pravaras.* There is one Sāṅkhya master named Pañcaśikha, reminding one of having five tufts.

35 Kinsley 1998: 83–84.

36 Kramrisch 1988: 322–23.

37 Stanley in Hiltebeitel 1989: 271–98.

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Section 4

Visualization and emotions

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6 Invoking emotions

Reading Tantric images in light of Rasa theory

The argument

Indian esthetic theories provide a foundation for addressing emotions. By utilizing Sanskrit esthetic theory to decipher Tantric culture, this chapter engages two classical Hindu systems.[1] In addressing the culture of Tantra (its arts and representations), two distinct features are apparent, one socio-historical and the other, contemplative and cognitive. The historic record demonstrates that Tantra and classical esthetics were two streams coursing through the cultural dialogue. Conceptually, we recognize that traditional Indian theories of moods and emotions can shed light on Tantric practices in ways that Western theories cannot. In other words, medieval India's own hermeneutics provides a framework to better understand Tantric visual culture. The bigger project of this chapter, however, is to demonstrate how emotions have been defined in classical India, how emotion is cultivated through contemplative practices, and what their significance is in actualizing the self. Eventually the chapter seeks to address some of the thorny questions regarding emotion in the contemporary discourse by borrowing essential concepts from classical Sanskrit esthetics and Tantric literature.[2]

Although the overlap and interface between the domains of *rasa* and Tantra have rarely been examined, their exchange is not so farfetched, as they both flourished in the same cultural platform. The eleventh-century polymath, Abhinavagupta, commented upon two seminal works on Indian esthetics, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata which was written between 200 BCE and 200 CE, and the *Dhvanyāloka* of Ānandavardhana (820–90).[3] While Bharata is renowned for his theory of *rasa* or "aesthetic relish," Ānanda shaped medieval Indian literary discourse with his doctrine of 'suggestion' (*dhvani*).[4] Abhinava is perhaps best known as a Tantric philosopher for his original treatises on Tantra and commentaries on the primary texts of the Trika and Pratyabhijñā systems. Besides Abhinava, several other Tantric exegetes such as Jayaratha, Amṛtānanda or Lakṣmīdhara, also worked in different aspects of esthetics. Surprisingly, however, these scholars rarely endeavored to integrate the two systems. The aim of this chapter is to change this scenario. And this approach is congruent with some of the arguments of contemporary scholars who have

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explored the scope of Indian esthetic theories and their applicability to read religious and other cultural aspects.[5]

The world-affirming attitude of Tantric philosophy and *rasa*-esthetics broadly deviate from renunciatory models of religious practice. Embodiment is central to cultivating mystical experience through various forms of visualization, and *rasa* provides the foundation for the philosophy of emotion in classical India. The very term *rasa,* which literally means 'juice' or 'relish' and is applied in esthetics to describe an elevated state of rapture, is used in multiple contexts to describe mystical experience. Along the same lines, the application of *bhāva* or emotion is central to the discourse on both esthetics and Tantra.[6] In *rasa* theory, the concept of *bhāva* can be understood by analyzing various dormant emotions and their stimulating factors. Tantras use *bhāva* as a constructive process where one imitates a specific lifestyle that leads him to uncover the divine modes that are innate (*sahaja*) to the practitioner.[7] This term is also used to describe various states of absorption/possession (*āveśa/ samāveśa*).[8] In addition to these two key terms pivotal to embodiment itself and to the discourse on *rasa,* esthetics, and Tantras, the centrality of emotion is vividly demonstrated in the religious discourse on devotion (*bhakti*).[9] In medieval India, cultivating emotions became prominent with the focus of attention shifting towards *bhakti,* from its rather marginal status in early times to the highest goal of life (*parama-puruṣārtha*).[10]

While classical Sanskrit esthetes engage in a hairsplitting debate over the roles that emotions (*bhāva*) play in stimulating esthetic experience (*rasa*), no one argues that raw emotions alone give rise to this experience, without the aid of assisting factors. The *rasa* experience has a transcendent quality that is not found in raw emotions. However, this author does not contend that mystical and esthetic experiences are identical. While it is the case that even mundane experiences are uniquely distinct from each other, there is no measuring stick to compare two different experiences that are both transcendent. The classical tendency of comparing these two experiences also supports the same argument. As Larson (1976: 374) argues, Abhinava "assimilates but goes beyond any view that would reduce the religious experience to the aesthetic experience." Relating *rasa* experience with the mystical is not a new issue; Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka compared the esthetic experience with the mystical experience of the yogis.[11] Abhinava in one place states that aesthetic experience is "like the bliss that comes from realizing [one's identity] with the highest Brahman, for it consists of repose in the bliss which is the true nature of one's own self, a nature which is basically *sattva* but is intermingled with the diversity of *rajas* and *tamas.*"[12]

Tantras provide the same positive outlook towards sensory pleasure and various other embodied experiences as does the aesthetic theory of *rasa*. The lived experience of Tantric rituals requires the active engagement of the adept's senses in alignment with their corresponding objects, directed to stimulate particular cognitive and emotional conditions. Different visualization practices seem to be associated with different emotional states. For instance,

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the visualization of Kālī is linked with the practice of wearing a sword, living in a cremation ground, or drinking liquor. The visualization of Tripurā, along the same lines, is linked with decoration, the use of fragrance, living a lavish lifestyle, music, etc.[13] If observed closely, it becomes clear that distinct Tantric practices place certain emotions at the center. A liberating esoteric experience, in this depiction, is not excluded from the play of emotions, but rather, these mundane experiences are essential in cultivating mystical experience. That Tantra is an emotionally active and rich tradition instead of an intellectual collection of concepts or an ascetic tradition devoid of passions is sufficient reason to embrace aesthetics for interpreting Tantric experience.

Emotions, even in the context when they are cultivated only in order to transcend them, are central to both Tantric and aesthetic experiences.[14] The esoteric experience, central to the practice of Tantra, is not a transcendental experience that manifests in negation of corporeality, but rather, it breaches the dichotomy of the mind and body. At the somatic level, this experience is a consequence not merely of so-called 'positive' emotions, but also of emotions such as fury, disgust, or marvel. Rather than transcending somatic conditions in order to achieve liberation, the Tantric approach embraces emotions as its path, and in this process, it provides a higher meaning to embodied experience. While the goal of both Tantric and aesthetic activity is to reach to the transcendent (*lokottara*) experience, it is in their immanent modes of rejoicing that the link between these two systems is found.

In the absence of this cultural frame of reference, Tantric visualizations are obscure and their rituals are perplexing. A discourse on Tantra that does not engage images and rituals is not a Tantric discourse. And it is not possible to apprehend these elements without bringing visualization to the center. More than that, a hermeneutic shift in the interpretation of emotions is mandatory, as Tantras not only embrace the idea of the erotic, but it also gives the same centrality to the so-called negative emotions. The placement of negative emotions within esthetic discourse is one of the essential features that make the marriage between these two systems possible.

Following *rasa* theory, there is not only a single mood that characterizes esthetic pleasure. Just as the viewer can experience bliss through watching a heroic drama, so also can he transform his experience to esthetic rapture through the sense of horror. Along the same lines, Tantras maintain that bliss and awareness – terms also used to describe the self – are at the core of every single experience. One could thus connect to this ontological ground through joy, disgust, or fear. When experienced as ordinary emotions, they can be positive or negative, but when elevated to the level of *rasa*, they all provide esthetic relish. The recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) of the self is thus not that of a disembodied and disinterested witnessing self. Accordingly, the body is not the problem but the means of liberation. Corporality is the presupposition of the emotional self and thus of liberation. Obscure Tantric practices, while reinforcing embodiment, simultaneously promote transcendence, as these experiences do not culminate in esthetic pleasure alone, but are considered as

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instrumental to the experience of *jagadānanda*, the all-embodying bliss found in the state of self-realization. Tantric contemplations differ primarily in the sense that they are not exclusive to certain emotions but rather, they seek to cultivate these dormant emotions to their fullest expression. And this centrality of emotions is what makes *rasa* theory compatible. Following the theory of *rasa*, esthetic bliss can be experienced in eight different modes: the experience of beauty, heroism, compassion, wonder, humor, fear, disgust, and anger. Four among these, the experience of heroism, fear, disgust, and anger embody violent aspects that can be present in the esthetic experience. Esthetic bliss, in this paradigm, not only transcends thoughts and emotions, it is simultaneously felt and corporeally experienced. The argument is, even the experience of violence, disgust, fear, or anger can stimulate esthetic pleasure as any other mood can, and any of these can likewise be instrumental in recognizing the essential nature of the self.

Both Tantra and *rasa* utilize the term of a 'transcendent astonishment' (*lokottara camatkāra*) to describe their highest state of experience. It would be wrong to understand this 'transcendent' (*lokottara* or *alaukika*) only as 'otherworldly.' The term *loka,* derived from the root √*locṛ* in the meaning of seeing, describes both the sensory faculties through which perception is made possible and the realm of perception. What is considered 'transcendent' is that which is beyond the scope of the sense organs. In this way, the *rasa* experience is posited as a sensation before it is cognized. It would be wrong, however, to understand *rasa* as just a coarse sensation. *Rasa* experience is explicitly cultivated, with multiple emotions merging together in a synthetic experience. This does not make *rasa* experience subordinate to, or distant from, self-experience either. Just like yogic experience is the most fundamental, albeit attained through rigorous practice and refined experience, so also is *rasa*, being the esthetic experience where the boundary between the experiencing self and the object of experience is marginal, and the self is introverted and reflexively experiencing its own blissful state. Jagannātha defines *rasa* experience as breaking the barrier that conceals consciousness (*cid*).[15] Since consciousness is identified with the self, the *rasa* experience is thus the inward experience of the self. While both Tantrikas and esthetes would hesitate to make the highest experiences sought by their disciples identical, the procedure through which these experiences are cultivated and the language used to describe them are stunningly similar.

The framework of rasa

That *rasa* theory is not monolithic can be clearly seen in the classical debate over the number of *rasas* and the mechanism to experience them.[16] This is not the place to engage the classical philosophical debate over the nature of *rasa,* as many contemporary writings address these issues.[17] The application of *rasa* to understand religious experience and the comparison of *rasa* to catharsis and its application as a viable literary theory is also not new.[18] Although

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available in secondary literature, it is necessary to briefly address the framework of *rasa* before engaging visualization practices in light of this esthetic theory.

According to Bharata, esthetic experience (*rasa*) is expressed through the "conjunction of the determinants (*vibhāvas*) [that function as the instigators], the consequents (*anubhāvas*) and the complementary psychological states (*vyabhicārins*) [that accompany the emotions]" (NŚ VI.33). The stimulants instrumental in bringing the dormant (*sthāyin*) emotions such as passion to the forefront of experience are called determinants. Those that are instrumental in causing passion etc. to be experienced as after or subordinate to another experience are called the consequents. Those that are instrumental in letting passion etc. flow throughout the body are called the complementary psychological states.[19] These are all subordinate to *rasa* experience. Bharata counts forty-nine emotions, of which he describes eight as 'dormant' (*sthāyin*). These emotions (love, joy, sorrow, anger, energy, fear, disgust, and astonishment) form the core of the eight central esthetic experiences (erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), comic (*hāsya*), tragic (*karuṇa*), furious (*raudra*), heroic (*vīra*), timorous (*bhayānaka*), disgusting (*bībhatsa*), and wonderous (*adbhuta*)). The emotions listed as 'dormant' are to be understood as "the emotion which is not swallowed up by other emotions whether friendly with it or unfriendly, which quickly dissolves the others into its own condition like the salt-sea, which endures continuously in the mind, and which, combining with its objects and situations, attains to its fullest expression as *rasa* – that is the durable emotion."[20]

Among these, only four *rasas* are considered as primary: erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), heroic (*vīra*), disgusting (*bībhatsa*), and furious (*raudra*). This, in essence, affirms the primacy of four durable emotions: desire (*rati*), heroic energy (*utsāha*), disgust (*jugupsā*), and anger (*krodha*). The discourse on *rasa* also highlights that there are four *rasas* that contrast and are paired with the remaining four (erotic with disgusting, heroic with timorous, furious with marvelous, and comic with tragic).[21] Along the same lines, a sentiment central to experiencing one *rasa* can be subsidiary to the experience of another. Furthermore, these *rasas* can manifest as dominant with one and subordinate with another. It is essential to bear in mind that, when the mind experiences *rajas* and *tamas* and is not supported by the surge of *sattva*, the same emotions remain raw and cannot complement the cultivation of *rasa*. However, when poised with *sattva* in mind, these otherwise ordinary emotions transform into the aesthetic experience. Accordingly, it is possible to undergo anger or disgust while the mind remains in the *sattvic* state. *Guṇas*, along these lines, are like the platforms through which the emotions pass. While not all emotions are latent, those considered dormant rise to the state of *rasa*. Certain emotions, along these lines, are essential to the self itself.[22] These features characterize the primacy of emotions in *rasa*. When Tantras appropriate this aesthetic framework and integrate esoteric experience with the play of emotions, it becomes clear that there is no tension within this system between the mind and the body.

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When emotions remain purely within the realm of corporeal sensation, they simply generate pain or pleasure and fail to stimulate the *rasa* experience. *Rasa* experience is thus distinct from a commonsense pleasure. These very emotions, when merged with the inner self having shattered the dichotomy of subject and object, give rise to the surge of bliss that is quintessential to the self. Aesthetic *rasa* experience is described as self-revealing, accepting its noetic quality. Tantras describe consciousness as reflexive and also identical to the self. When enjoying *rasa*, there is merely a flow of *sattva*, the pure mode of mental experience, no matter what the particular stimulating factor that gives rise to the *rasa* experience is (*Sāhityadarpaṇa* SD 3.2–3). In other words, emotions such as anger, disgust, or horror lack the qualities of *rajas* and *tamas* when being experienced as *rasa*. And in this state, the mind is naturally turned inward, as it is the nature of *sattva* to orient towards the self.[23]

Rasa is described as 'self-manifest and of the nature of bliss and awareness' (*svaprakāśānanda-cinmaya*), and 'devoid of the touch with any other object of cognition' (*vedyāntarasparśaśūnya* SD 3.2). The first attribute identifies the emotional experience that is elevated to the status of *rasa* with the self, and the second negates contact with any externals, even if mental. *Rasa* is thus the very self revealed, and the play of emotions is as central to self-experience as it is for embodiment. This *rasa* experience is also explained as 'devoid of portions' (*akhaṇḍa*), differentiating it from the particular experiences where the subject-object dichotomy is essential. This transcendent or precognitive quality of *rasa* experience is what distinguishes it from commonsense experience. However, it is not the case that the emotions that instigate the *rasa* experience are lacking in the subsequent stage of transforming into *rasa*. All the emotions are singularly felt in the mode of experiencing *rasa*, like tasting a cocktail drink.[24] This experience is synethetic by definition, and makes the generic entity as its object, rather than objectifying a particular.

Utilizing the same arguments, Madhusūdana confirms that *rasa* experience is blissful, even when derived from painful emotions such as anger, disgust, or grief. He maintains that although the emotions residing in the object of awareness generate pain or pleasure accordingly, these very emotions, when residing in the subject of awareness, generate pure bliss.[25] *Rasa* experience thus transcends the reference that stimulates particular emotions. This is when the flow of consciousness found in externalized instances of emotions returns back to its source, to the subject of experience, and manifests in the form of *rasa*. In this *rasa* experience, the mind has a single mode of *sattva*, comprised of collective emotions. This collective manifestation of multiple moods that stimulate *sattva* gives rise to transcendent bliss.[26] The essence of *rasa* experience is 'wonder'[27] where the self is revealed. This disclosure, while being instigated by emotions, cannot be reduced to them, and this is why Abhinava avoids using the terms of coming to experience, rise, or manifestation, when describing *rasa* experience.[28]

The question remains, even if *rasa* experience does arise through emotions that are blissful, with the argument that the self is of the character of

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undivided bliss (*ānanda*), how can the negative emotions that are painful and thus opposite to the self-nature instigate the expression of *rasa*? Viśvanātha responds to this objection by saying that even tragic emotions are embedded with the supreme delight and this is vivid even in ordinary experiences (SD 3.4). The argument is plain and simple: if the pain experienced in watching a tragedy is not subordinated by another blissful experience, one would not watch it again (SD 3.5). The shift from common emotion to esthetic bliss is thus easier to explain in the case when negative emotions are assisting the *rasa* experience. According to Viśvanātha, these emotions do give pain in the ordinary context, but what makes it different is the context of poetry (SD 3.6–7). Viśvanātha argues that, just as one enjoys the mild masochistic sex act of biting, these pain sensations, if they stimulate *rasa* experience, do not result in causing pain.[29] This example from commonsense experience differs from the earlier one, where the transcendence of *rasa* experience somewhat overshadows the ordinary experience of pain. Just as the esthetes maintain that all emotions are potent enough to instigate the *rasa* experience, so do the Tantrikas, by saying that all ordinary experiences have the same transcendent bliss and awareness embedded within.

Rasa experience has both immanent and transcendent qualities. As emotion, it is embodied, and since it is not simply a raw emotion but cultivated in a specific way that allows the mind to move beyond its everyday constructs, it is also transcendent. This distinction is vividly demonstrated when we explore the arguments that address the cultivation of *rasa*. Emotions do not necessarily grant esthetic bliss. Disgust, fear, or anger may simply arise and dissolve after leaving some somatic imprints. These same emotions, when endowed with appropriate complements, culminate in *rasa*, the esthetic experience. The embodied nature of *rasa* experience is exemplified with the specific emotions (*bhāva*) that are called *sāttvika*. Eight *sāttvika* moods counted by Bharata – spellbound (*stambha*), perspiration (*sveda*), horripilation (*romāñca*), voice breaking (*svarabhaṅga*), tremor (*vepathu*), change of color (*vaivarṇyam*), tears (*aśru*), and being unconscious (*pralaya*) – are the corporeal symptoms of emotional content.[30] SD details that these symptoms are considered as originated from *sattva* (SD 3.134), and therefore are not the products of the senses being engaged with external entities. A clear distinction can be made between these symptoms derived in reaction to stimuli and those manifest by the surge of bliss. Similar symptoms are also described in the progressive steps of the rise of *kuṇḍalinī*, yet another key element that relates esthetic and mystical experiences to one another.[31] The *sāttvika* mood here explicitly describes the inverse flow of consciousness from outside where it is engaged with objects, to the self-nature experienced when turning inwards, the reflexive or self-manifesting consciousness that is inherently blissful. It is noteworthy that the experiences that are considered *sāttvika* ground corporeality, highlighting that both the instantaneous experience of *rasa* and the transcendent experience of the self as bliss that is felt during the mystical experience are somatic in nature. This centrality of *sāttvika* experiences in the cultivation of *rasa*

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highlights corporeality, and at the same time, the two experiences of *rasa* and yogic absorption bear many similarities.

The embodied nature of *rasa* experience is just one aspect of the story. Classical esthetes such as Abhinava maintained that the esthetic *rasa* experience is transcendent. *Rasa,* in this depiction, is inherent to the self which has the characteristics of bliss and awareness. Just as the smell in soil becomes pungent when soaked in water, so do *rasas* manifest when triggered by *vibhāva* and so on. This argument of Abhinava provides the much needed framework to establish that emotions such as disgust and anger can stimulate fearsome (*raudra*) or loathsome (*bībhatsa*) *rasas.*[32] The transcendence of *rasa* experience makes it irreducible to its causes, for the esthetes such as Abhinava do not maintain that there is a real cause and effect relation in *rasa* experience. This transcendence of *rasa* experience further supports the claim that both positive and negative emotions have the same potential to stimulate *rasa*.

The Maṇḍala of emotions

The discussion above has placed emotions on an equal platform in the sense that they all have the potential to rise to *rasa*. Some emotions play a primary role and others are secondary; nonetheless, they do stimulate esthetic experience. The experience of disgust or anger is thus within the scope of esthetic bliss. This position is pivotal in describing Tantric visualization, where emotions, particularly the negative ones, appear ubiquitous. *Guhyasamāja* makes it explicit that the deities in four corners of the *maṇḍala* of the Tathāgatas are the emanations of the central deity, where the process of embodiment is precisely linked with depicting specific emotions. Accordingly, Akṣobhya is an embodiment of hatred (*dveṣa*) inherent to Tathāgata and so is Vairocana of delusion (*moha*) and Lokeśvara of passion (*raga*). Along the same lines, the four female counterparts in the *maṇḍala* are considered an embodiment of hatred (*dveṣa*), delusion (*moha*), envy (*īrṣyā*), and passion (*raga*).[33] These four emotions have the resonance of the four dormant emotions that are instrumental in instigating the four central *rasas.* This depiction of emotions in *Guhyasamāja* allows us to further explore the role emotions play in Tantric visualization, demonstrating the centrality of the three emotions of passion, hatred, and delusion when the deity *maṇḍalas* became ubiquitous.[34] One thing is explicit in this presentation: if the Tathāgatas or the deities were devoid of these emotions, they could not have materialized in the form of peripheral deities.

There is a direct link between Tantric visualization having a primacy of emotions and its monistic philosophy that accepts 1. the self or consciousness as actively engaged in the world, and that 2. the rituals that engage the senses upon their corresponding objects allow one to recognize the self in its dynamism. In the paradigm where the self is equated with Bhairava and the senses with the deities surrounding him, sensory engagement and in essence embodied experiences are intrinsic to the self. Self-realization, in this paradigm, contains

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both the mental or cognitive as well as the felt domains. Select divine names found in Tantric texts make it explicit that the divine body is very much comprised of emotions. The Tantric philosophy that accepts both transcendence and immanence makes it possible to argue for pure consciousness without isolating emotions and embodiment from the essential nature of the self. If we examine the select names of the goddess used to invoke her in the *Devī māhātmya* (DM), we come to the same conclusion, that emotions that give us a clear sense of being in the body are also the divine aspects. DM first invokes the goddess as Mahāmāyā, the great illusion (DM 1.3, 54), and the same verse addresses her also as Yoganidrā or the yogic slumber. While consciousness gives an instant awareness of the separation of the subject from the body, sleep on the other hand, brings awareness to the body, identifying the body as the core of being. DM 1.55 further states that this is the very goddess who brings even the wise ones to delusion. The divine here is not the one who illumines, but the one who abides in the heart of all and keeps them in perpetual slumber. The goddess is invoked as the great delusion (Mahāmohā), great illusion (Mahāmāyā), and the great demoness (Mahāsurī) (DM 1.77). In addition, she is bashfulness (*hrī*), and is also identified as cognition (*buddhi*), modesty (*lajjā*), and forbearance (*kṣānti*) (DM 1.79). These, nevertheless, are not her only aspects, as she is also invoked as faith (*śraddhā*) and modesty (*lajjā*) (DM 4.5). The text is explicit in invoking the transcendent in terms of immanence and embodiment while embracing negative emotions.

The image of the deity is ubiquitously depicted as embodying opposites; she is a profound paradox. Just as she is identified as pure consciousness, she is also embodied and manifests through various emotions. She is found in both exceedingly peaceful and most ferocious forms (DM 5.13). She is addressed as consciousness shared by all the sentient beings (DM 5.17–19), and also as intellect (*buddhi*), slumber (*nidrā*), hunger (*kṣudhā*), vitality (*śakti*), craving (*tṛṣṇā*), forgiveness (*kṣānti*), modesty (*lajjā*), peace (*śānti*), faith (*śraddhā*), memory (*smṛti*), compassion (*dayā*), satisfaction (*tuṣṭi*), and illusion (*bhrānti*) (DM 5.20–76). Along the same lines, she is invoked as the driving force behind the sensory faculties (*indriyāṇām adhiṣṭhātṛ*) (DM 5.77). Explicitly, this is not the isolation of the mind from the body, or concentration upon it, or the experience of transcendent awareness separated from emotions. The approach here is to embrace emotions consciously, or, in other words, to find the transcendent nature of consciousness, the experiencing self, while invoking emotions such as compassion, forgiveness, modesty, and so on. Noteworthy is the fact that these emotions are not invoked as embodied in the goddess but as the divinity herself: following the text, the divine is situated in these forms among all beings.[35]

According to this description, even the ignorance of the self due to the darkness of delusion is not out of the scope of pure consciousness (*citi*). The transformation of awareness through emotions such as hunger, craving, and illusion are merely the modalities of awareness (*citirūpa* DM 5.78–80).

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Recognition of the self, in this paradigm, is not through the negation of the emotions that are considered lower. Rather, one recognizes the true nature of the self through the realization of the immanence of the goddess, or the engaged presence of consciousness in all modes of emotions. Just as body is a constellation of consciousness, so also are emotions: being in the body is having bodily sensations and emotions, and recognition of the divine presence is through the acknowledgement of emotions and their transformative powers.

The depiction of emotions is central to Tantric imagery, and the very names of the deities explicitly narrate this centrality of emotion. For instance, Bhairavas are named as 'ferocious' (Caṇḍa), 'anger' (Krodha), 'intoxicated with sexual arousal' (Unmatta), or 'fearsome' (Bhīṣaṇa). One of the main goddesses in the tradition of Tripurā is Kāmeśvarī or the goddess of desire or eros. Texts such as *Saundaryalaharī* exploit the link of *rasas* with the goddess Tripurā, where she is invoked as manifesting all eight *rasas* simultaneously (SL 51).[36] Beauty and erotic pleasure are essential in all internal and external domains of worshipping Tripurā. Just like the contrasts between erotic and disgusting, heroic and timorous, furious and marvelous, and comic and tragic are vividly portrayed in the discourse on *rasa*, the difference in visualization of Tripurā and Kālī is starkly visible. This contradiction becomes more pronounced in the case of Cāmuṇḍā who is also invoked as the one with 'Deformed Face' (Vikṛtarūpiṇī), 'Pendulous Lips' (Pralamboṣṭhi), 'Broken Nose' (Bhagnanāsike), 'Sunken Face' (Cipiṭāmukhe), or 'Owl Face' (Ulūkavadanā).[37] Where the flowers being carried by Tripurā express erotism, Cāmuṇḍā wears entrails, skulls, and a garland of human hands. Tripurā enjoys wine and Cāmuṇḍā drinks blood, Tripurā sits on a lotus whereas Cāmuṇḍā rides a corpse, and Tripurā lives in the lotus grove while Cāmuṇḍā resides in the cremation ground. This contrast can also be found in their associates, their vehicle, or even the background. Zimmer points out that the vehicles of the deities function as determinants in the process of unraveling esthetic moods (Zimmer 1992: 71).

The divine play of emotions

The interplay of the two disciplines of esthetics and Tantra is explicit in the ritual visualization of the *maṇḍalas*, where the deities embody *rasa* experience by displaying various emotions. At the same time, deity images also relate to the gradual modes of mystical experience. The display of emotions thus becomes a language to communicate the state that transcends linguistic discourse. Just as *rasa* experience is transcendent in its essence while being revealed by immanent means, the esoteric experience transcends its subject and object, although being derived through visualizing images. This overlap between the systems provides us with an opportunity to relate one domain with the other.

The project of reading images through the lens of emotions is sustained even by some historical factors. Bharata, the founder of the Indian esthetic

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system, associates different deities with particular emotions. His list runs as follows:

Viṣṇu	erotic (*sṛṅgāra*)
Pramatha	comic (*hāsya*)
Rudra	furious (*raudra*)
Yama	tragic (*karuṇa*)
Mahākāla	odious (*bībhatsa*)
Kāla	terrible (*bhayānaka*)
Mahendra	heroic (*vīra*)
Brahmā	marvelous (*adbhuta*).[38]

This list makes it clear that early esthetes interpreted *rasa* as a cosmic play where various deities correspond to different emotions. The relation of Rudra with fury is explicit, and even the very name of the deity reinforces this link. The link of Yama to tragic emotion is likewise clear, as Yama is the god of death. The most fearsome images of Kāla or Kālī elicit terror or dread. In the Vedic literature, Indra was associated with heroism. Viṣṇu's power to manifest as an enchanting woman (Mohinī) or his incarnation of Kṛṣṇa demonstrate Bharata's coupling of Viṣṇu with erotic sentiment. In essence, this identification of deities with emotions is thorough, when we examine the myths and visualizations of the deities in the list. Tantras borrowed this framework when systematizing the deity *maṇḍala* and prescribing visualization. The most common category to describe their deities is in the group of eight: Sanskrit syllables are divided into groups of eight; the male (Bhairava) and the female (Mātṛkā) deities are grouped in eight each, and *maṇḍalas* are constructed with the most external sphere representing this eightfold grouping. The link between this categorization with eight emotions is therefore crucial. And this link is found in a later Tantric text, the *Bhāvanopaniṣad*:

> "The ascertained *rasas* such as the erotic and the perfections such as being infinitesimally small [represent] eight energies such as Brāhmī that are comprised of desire, aversion, avarice, delusion, drunkenness, envy, virtue, and vice."[39]

In shifting the discussion from deity images to rituals, just as a drama generates *rasa*, a refined cocktail of emotions, by evoking particular emotions and allowing subjects to transform their sentiments and moods to the transcendent experience that cannot be reduced to any specific emotion, so also does visualization allow the viewer to transform their extroverted consciousness and object-directed pleasure to self-oriented and transcendent bliss. The deity, in this paradigm, is the luminous body of awareness. With deities expressing emotions through every gesture and posture, it becomes clear that emotion and consciousness are inseparably identical. As a consequence, the phenomenal self can be understood through the prism of emotions, and the liberating

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experience is embodied and in essence, emotional. Through its innate vibrancy, the self or consciousness engages with emotions by means of the flow of the senses. Just like the self is equated with the central deity in a *maṇḍala*, the sense organs are comparable to the surrounding deities. One can expand the argument based on the above parallels that the self is in essence the summation of, and at the same time the enjoyer of all the *rasas* simultaneously. Not only does this understanding identify consciousness with emotion, it also grounds the embodied nature of liberating experience. Emotions, while residing in and being reflected in the body, are integral to consciousness. These emotions evoke, or more literally, 'suggest' the transcendent self, of the nature of bliss and awareness unbound by any specificity.

In order to ground the argument that emotional experience of the self (where the self is cognizing the very self as emotions) is integral to Tantric visualization, I will offer a few examples from common Tantric images. This will also engage the so-called 'negative emotions,' further problematizing the paradigm where the self is distinct from emotions. Kālī, one of the foremost deities in Tantra, simultaneously displays various emotions, most of which are 'negative.' Her glaring eyes, spiky fangs, and garlands of skulls and snakes evoke fear; her residence in the cremation ground filled with rotting flesh, the company of the canines, and her consumption of entrails and flesh evoke disgust; her striding atop Śiva and carrying a shiny sword with a freshly chopped head of a demon depict heroism. The emotions of fury and horror surround her stage. She, however, is the 'supreme goddess' (*mahādevī*) identified with pure consciousness and the self which in essence is all-encompassing bliss. This example alone confirms the above arguments that associate emotion with the self, and the role of negative emotions in cultivating mystical and esthetic experiences. Accordingly, one cannot actualize the self dissociated from emotions, as the emotional self is not something to be shunned but to be recognized. The problem of discrediting emotions, particularly the negative ones, lies with dualism, and the Tantric tradition under consideration – the Trika, Kaula, and Śākta philosophies – are essentially non-dual. The insights from Tantric philosophy and *rasa* esthetics problematize the readings where the role given to the body and the emphasis upon emotion are marginal. These arguments are also noteworthy for those advocating a universality of esthetic or mystical experiences, because the process of cultivating such experiences, and the discussion upon them, are very dissimilar. This reading, however, is congruent with those who acknowledge the role of cultures in cultivating emotions.

Tantric rituals of visualization epitomize embodied theology and the fluidity of emotions. Just as many Tantric deities display the emotion of heroism, one of the Tantric practices instructs the practitioner to cultivate this specific emotion by maintaining the mood of heroism (*vīrabhāva*). One of the most popular Śākta rituals in India, the worship of Durgā that involves making the statue of the goddess and participating in the celebratory chariot festival gives rise to a surge of heroic feeling. The deity imagery suggests the same theme of the gods subdued by demons and the supreme goddess protecting all three

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realms by defeating the demon. While the play of heroism in the act of her visualization may not be liberating in itself, all emotions including that of heroism capture Durgā's phenomenal and transcendent aspects. The *rasa* experience here begins with the sensation of heroism and culminates with self-realization. While not central, the emotions of erotic experience and compassion are explicit in myths and visualizations of the goddess. The celebration of the goddess with dance, chants, and her display in the chariot, all evoke heroism, with subordinate emotions eliciting this central emotion. If the self were devoid of emotion, the Śākta paradigm of the centrality of Durgā, whose essence is heroic emotion, would be inconsistent.

In the practice of Bhairava, fear becomes instrumental to liberation. As his other names suggest, he is after all 'fearsome' (Bhīṣaṇa, Bhayaṅkara). The name Bhairava comes from his fearsome howl. His glaring eyes are frightening, and his large dark body with snakes, skulls, and the hides of elephant and tiger heightens the viewer's sense of fear. Transforming fear through experiencing its concentrated image as Bhairava is the basis of the practice. The metaphors of the cremation ground and night suggest death: when visualizing Bhairava, the real gaze is upon death. While the central mood experienced here is fear, this experience of fear is nonetheless conducive to self-realization, as the course of practice culminates with Bhairava standing for the self, transcending fear and death. The visible image or the emotions displayed are, in this sense, a gateway to its opposite: the journey that started with fear ends by transcending it. The centrality of the esthetic mood of fear (*bhayānaka*) is vivid in all forms of Bhairava practice. Just as the image of Durgā displays heroism along with other subordinate emotions, Bhairava's imagery portrays fury (*raudra*), disgust (*bībhatsa*), and heroism (*vīra*). Often invoked in a pair, Kālī and Bhairava bear many similar characteristics. These are also the central deities of Trika, the non-dual stream of Tantric practice. The embodiment of death at the end signifies immortality, as is vivid in the practice of Kālī. Bhairava's journey begins with fear and culminates with fearlessness. These deities, following the philosophy of Abhinava, are mirror images of the self. This embodiment of negative emotions in the course of transcending them problematizes the theologies that view the divine only in positive terms. This also brings negative emotions from the periphery to the center.

Bhairava images bring to prominence the expressions of heroism, wrath, and fear. The Buddhist Tantric deity Heruka depicts similar meanings by embodying multiple emotions: his eyes suggest delusion, his ears are linked with anger, the mouth with greed, the nose with miserliness, and the torso with jealousy.[40] The imagery of Cakrasaṃvara Heruka is detailed in such a way that the deity manifests one or another emotion through various gestures and weapons. For instance, the deity's two weapons, the thunderbolt and bell, held in the uppermost hands, are described as signifying emptiness and compassion. His two arms embracing the goddess (Vajravārāhī) suggest power and wisdom, and the raw elephant hide held by the next two arms represents ignorance. The dagger of the deity depicts the removal of pride. His staff

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Figure 6.1 Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī

Figure 6.2 Cāmuṇḍā

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signifies supreme bliss. The head of Brahmā that the deity carries displays his control over delusion. The deity subdues time and death, shown by striding atop two dark and red figures. The dark and subordinated figure, Yama, also indicates duality, and the deity that dominates him becomes a metaphor of non-duality. The gem that ties the deity's hair indicates fulfillment of all desires and the crescent moon the deity wears signifies the Bodhi mind. Bhairava's frowning face and tightly clenched teeth are the metaphors of overcoming negative emotions. The tiger hide covering the deity's body suggests his heroism. In the same way, the skull cup filled with blood and held in Vajravārāhī's left hand signifies supreme bliss and her nudity is interpreted as her victory over passion.[41]

Central to the imagery of Cāmuṇḍā is the emotion of disgust (*bībhatsa*) and the goddess is visualized wearing a garland of heads. The argument of the non-dual Tantras is not just to identify the goddess with negative emotion, but also to identify her with the self, and along these lines, the self is embodied and emotions are integral to it. It is not that the experience of disgust is considered liberating, but that the awareness of the self while undergoing emotional states grants the liberating wisdom. When transformed into *rasa*, even the experience of disgust (*bībhatsa*) has the primacy of *sattva*. What constitutes negativity in experiencing emotions is not the emotions per se but the basic moods that underly these experiences. This justifies encountering Cāmuṇḍa as enlightening. In other words, in all transformations, experience and the self are identical and the awareness of the self is embodied and enriched with emotions, whether negative or positive. The corporeal depiction of Cāmuṇḍā as wearing entrails, consuming blood, fat, and meat, and riding a corpse, all elicit disgust, and like other images, she also evokes other emotions that are subordinate. Not only does this paradigm consider emotional growth as integral to spiritual progress, it also supports the claim that self and emotion are inseparable. Just like a calm ocean still holds the potential of the tsunami, negative emotions are not eradicated from the enlightened self, and just like the tides indicate the wind, emotions describe the active engagement of the self.

Another popular Tantric imagery is that of Chinnamastā, whose visualization powerfully brings multiple emotions into action. The goddess stands astride a couple in amorous play, depicting erotic sentiment. She severs her own head, depicting heroism. She feeds her subordinates with her own blood, depicting compassion. Her action of severing her head and the three flows of blood oozing out also stimulates the emotion of perplexity (*adbhuta*). The very act of self-beheading also stimulates the emotion of fear. The emotions of disgust and anger can be generated by the sight of oozing blood, the spectacle of the goddess severing her own head, her companions celebrating her decapitation, and the ensuing bloodshed. The characters in this visualization, the couple in amorous play, her associates, and particularly the goddess herself, are smiling, depicting comic sentiment. The image of a deity, following this argument, is the constellation of emotions that are expressed in their true form, the self-nature, when expressed as *rasa*. In *rasa* experience, there is no simultaneous

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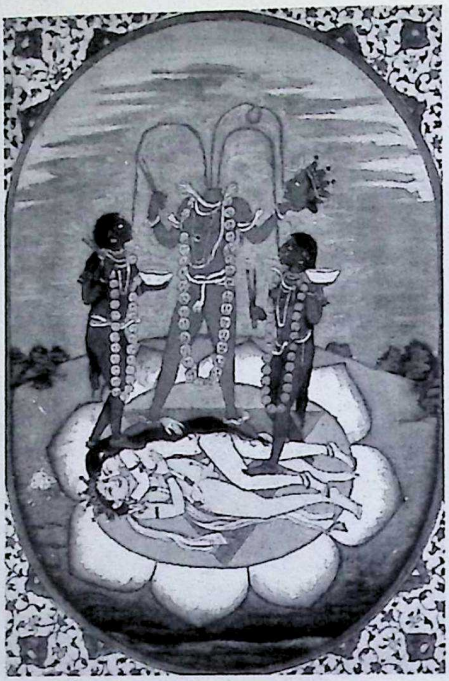

Figure 6.3 Chinnamastā

experience of various permanent moods, as one subordinates the other. In mystical experience, they all arise simultaneously as subordinate to a higher experience. In this process, first the emotions are turned into *rasa* experience, and then this experience is elevated, prolonging the duration of a single stream of thought-qua-emotion, eventually turning into bliss-awareness.

The images of deities, in the *rasa* paradigm, function to carry out two roles: one to invoke the inner *rasa* experience through external stimuli and in this case, their functioning is similar to any esthetic object, and the next is to transform that *rasa* experience to the experience of the absolute, Brahman. Following this perspective, the external support of visualization, a *maṇḍala* for instance, merely invokes inner states, allowing the practitioner to encounter the mirror-image of the self. External stimuli are experienced in fragments in either case, and thus the complete artwork is subjective: here, real visualization occurs. In the realized state, there is no experience that is not part of the very absolute, and so there is actually no dichotomy between the two. The difference, however, is in complete transformation in the case of mystical experience, while a simple *rasa* experience is less powerful in transforming psycho-somatic conditions of the experiencing subject. When reported, the esoteric experience occurring through visualization is still a *rasa* experience. However, it liberates the subject from external stimuli and the subject is not dependent upon the visualized object for the surge of elevated bliss, and he is able to regenerate

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this experience even in the absence of external stimuli. Understanding visualization allows one to recognize the harmony between esthetic *rasa* experience and the experience of the transcendent that is expressed through the divine images. Visualization, in this light, is not merely conjuring an image or relating it to abstract concepts, it is also an active engagement with archetypal emotions. All emotions in this elevated consciousness function as tools for enlightenment: the same emotions that tie ordinary consciousness to name and form and evoke passion or aversion also allow the reversal of gaze, turning towards the self. Deities such as Kālī or Bhairava, along these lines, not only display emotions but also suggest that the viewers incorporate their emotions and experience liberation while being engaged in the world. Since the deities are repeatedly addressed as identical to the self in the non-dual paradigm, the emotions the deities display are not outside the self. Visualization, thus, aims to give the insight of the self while witnessing the play of emotions amid the turmoil of emotions.

The image of Kāmeśvarī – the goddess of desire and the controlling energy of the world – uniquely depicts the interplay of the self, consciousness, and emotion. The goddess is invoked as Sundarī, the beautiful one, and she suggests eroticism through her posture and gestures. With her two arms, she carries a sugarcane bow and five arrows comprised of five different flowers, and with the other two, she carries the goad that controls and the noose that binds. Even the deities invoked in her *maṇḍala*, such as 'she who enchants all' (Sarvasammohinī), 'she who entrances all' (Sarvastambhinī), and 'she who controls all' (Sarvavaśaṅkarī), suggest her hypnotizing qualities. The *Bhāvanopaniṣad* equates Kāmeśvara, the consort of goddess Kāmeśvarī, with pure consciousness and the very self, eternally filled with bliss.[42] Following this text, Kāmeśvarī, also invoked as Lalitā, is portrayed as having a red hue and wearing red garments; the color describes the reflective aspect of awareness.[43] The same text describes that her bow made of sugarcane refers to the mind, passion (*rāga*) is suggested by the rope that binds, aversion (*dveṣa*) is suggested by the goad the deity carries, and the five sense organs are indicated by the five arrows that the goddess holds.[44] The centrality of erotic emotion is vivid in Bhagamālinī, the goddess who wears the garland of wombs and Nityaklinnā, the eternally aroused goddess, two other emanations of Tripurā.[45] With heroism subordinate to eroticism, the imagery of the goddess exemplifies tender emotions and their role in the transformation of the self.

Just as the contrast between passion (*rāga*) and aversion (*dveṣa*) is essential in the discourse on *rasa*, so also is it central in deciphering Tantric images. The imagery of Kālī vividly portrays aversion, contrasting the imagery of Tripurā that displays passion. The term *rāga* in Sanskrit stands not only for passion, but also for the color red, and the goddess Tripurā is red in hue. Kālī's dark body portrays the darkness of *tamas* that gives rise to negative emotions. She is additionally invoked as *tāmasī*, or the one filled with *tamas*. She is Mahāmāyā, the cosmic 'delusion' (*moha*) who projects externality. At the same time, she also stands for the self identified with pure consciousness. When examining

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the posture of Tripurā, her erotic gestures, shocking lust, amorously depicted body portrayed as red, completely clothed and youthful, her swelling breasts, all express passion. And she is nonetheless the goddess of liberation.

As explained above, emotions are not obstacles on the way to liberation but the very manifestation of the self to be actualized. This thesis extends also to the emotion of experiencing tragedy that the goddess Dhūmāvatī portrays. The underlying myth of the hunger of the goddess, who, in her wrath mixed with hunger, eats her consort Śiva, and the image of her roaming as a widow with her pitiful face, brings tragedy to the spotlight. While tragic emotion is at the center, the peripheral emotions of anger, disgust, and fear accompany the imagery. She can metonymically suggest hunger. What is essential to this discourse is, she is nonetheless the goddess of wisdom (Mahāvidyā), capable of granting liberation. This entire visualization of deities, particularly those depicting negative emotions, would not be meaningful, if the self were devoid of emotion. The paradigm of *rasa* allows us to address this in the proper light: emotions, even when eliciting pain, help cultivate self-awareness. The self, following this paradigm, does not exclude either emotions or the body.

This discussion allows us to reach the following conclusions. One, the paradigm of *rasa* facilitates addressing opaque Tantric images that are otherwise difficult to understand. Two, emotion and the self or consciousness do not constitute a polarity, but rather, they are one and the same entity manifest in different modes. Three, the dualistic model discredits emotions in the discourse of the self and dissociates embodiment from consciousness. A proper counter to this theory lies in Tantric visualization and the *rasa* theory. Finally, just as there are various emotions, particularly those found in the *rasa* experience that are culturally and linguistically construed, the assumptions regarding the self are also grounded on culture, and self-realization involves actualization of this embodied and emotional aspect of the self. Just as reading Tantric images through the lens of *rasa* unravels deeper aspects of visualization, engaging Tantric philosophy in the discourse on emotion allows us to explore the relation of the self and emotions and to address negative emotions in a proper light.

Notes

1 For the study of the esthetic and the mystical aspects in Abhinavagupta's literature, see Cuneo 2006, and Gnoli (1956)'s 'Aesthetic Experience.'
2 For emotion and metaphor, see Emanatian 1995: 163–82; and Kövecses 1990.
3 K.C. Pandey's (1963) classic work is still the most detailed study of the contributions of Abhinavagupta. The study and translation of *Dhvanyāloka* by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan is another essential study of the classical Indian esthetics in modern scholarship. Besides the works of Abhinavagupta and Ānandavardhana, I have utilized works by Viśvanātha (*Sāhityadarpaṇa*), and Jagannātha (*Rasagaṅgādhara*) for this discussion. For discussion on *rasa* in light of Tantras, see Skora 2007a, 2007b, 2009; and Timalsina 2007.

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4 For discussion on *rasa* theory, see Devy 2002; Ballantyne and Dasa Mitra 1994; and Raghavan 1967. For discussion on *dhvani*, see Ingalls *et al.* 1990; and Pandey 1963. For a general discourse on rasa, see Honeywell 1969: 165–76; Gerow and Aklujkar 1972: 80–87; Gitomer 2000: 219–36; Bhattacharya 1935: 237–47; Burke 1973; de Sousa 1987; Gerow 1994: 186–208; Ingalls 1963; Ingalls *et al.* 1990; Hanks 1996; Kosambi and Gokhale 1957; Krishnamoorthy 1974: 114–36; Malamoud 1982: 33–54; McCrea 1997; Pollock 1998: 117–92; and Pollock 2003.

5 For religion and *rasa*, see Wulff 1984, 1986; Larson 1976; Walton 2007: 31–41; and Stange 1984: 113–34. For *rasa* and art, see Mukerjee 1965: 91–96.

6 Although *bhāva* cannot always be translated as emotion and even the concept of emotion is not well defined in contemporary philosophy, I am considering *bhāva* as emotion in a very general sense, and by *bhāva*, I am primarily referring to the *sthāyī-bhāvas.*

7 For *dīvya*, *vīra*, and *paśu bhāvas*, see *Puraścaryārṇava*, vol. 3, pages 277–88 (in Rana 1972).

8 For terms including *bhāva* that apply to the states of possession, see Smith 2006: 113, 120, 356.

9 Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *Bhagavad-bhakti-rasāyana* is one of the central texts that identifies the devotional practice of *bhakti* as *rasa*. In the Vaiṣṇavite context, Rūpa Gosvāmī's works (1937 and 1961) are noteworthy. For the liturgical expression of emotions in Bhakti traditions, see Timm 1991: 59–75.

10 For *bhakti* as the final goal of life (*paramapuruṣārtha*), see Nelson 2004: 345–92.

11 For discussion, see Larson 1976: 375.

12 Locana in Ingalls *et al.* 1990: 222: lines 16–20.

13 *Puraścaryārṇava*, vol. 3, pages 248–76 (in Rana 1972) for various orders linked with different deity visualizations.

14 For some contemporary studies on metaphor and emotions, see Kövecses 1986, 2000, 2005; and Forceville 2005.

15 Following Jagannātha's presentation, Abhinavagupta maintains that *rasa* is the dormant mental imprint or 'perfume' (... *prāgvinivisṭavāsanārūpo ratyādir eva rasaḥ* | RG 1:88) left by the emotion of love, etc. The permanent mood (*stāyī bhāva*) such as love is considered *rasa* also by Mammaṭa in his *Kāvyaprakāśa* by saying that '*sthāyī bhāvo rasaḥ smṛtaḥ* |' Jagannātha defines *rasa* as 'the permanent mood such as love qualified by the consciousness with its conditioning factors destroyed' (*bhagnāvaraṇacidviśiṣṭā ratyādiḥ sthāyī bhāvo rasaḥ*). RG 1:96.

16 The debate over the number of *rasas* is an old one and is covered in Raghavan 1940. Abhinavagupta briefly summarizes the positions regarding the manifestation of *rasas* in his *Dhvanyāloka-Locana* (DĀL), Chapter 2. Texts such as *Kāvyaprakāśa, Kāvyādarśa*, or *Rasagaṅgādhara* are noteworthy in their contribution to this classical debate.

17 Many studies have emerged after Pandey 1959. Select studies include Masson and Patwardhan 1969; Nandi 1973; Gerow 1994: 186–208; and Chaudhury 1965b. For engaging the philosophical aspect of *dhvani*, see Amaladass 1984. On *rasa* and general poetics, see Honeywell 1969: 165–76.

18 For comparative studies on *rasa,* see Higgins 2007; Chaudhury 1965b: 151–63; Wadia 1981: 71–77; Schechner 2001: 27–50; Patankar 1980; Hussain and Wilkinson 2006; Gerow 2002; Thampi 1965; Chari 1976: 287–99; and Hogan 1996: 164–78.

19 See SD 3.131c-133b. For definition, see: *tatra vibhāvanaṃ ratyāder viśeṣeṇāsvādāṅkuraṇayogyatānayanam* | *anubhāvanam evaṃbhūtasya ratyādeḥ samanantaram eva rasādirūpatayā bhāvanam* | *sañcāraṇaṃ tathābhūtasyaiva tasya samyak cāraṇam* | Viśvanātha's auto-commentary on SD 3.13. See also: *vāsanārūpatayātisūkṣmar ūpeṇāvasthitān ratyādīn sthāyinaḥ vibhāvayanty āsvādayogyatāṃ nayantīti vibhāvāḥ*

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| *ratyādīn sthāyino 'nubhāvanayty anubhāvaviṣayīkurvantīty anubhāvāḥ* | *samyak (sarvāṅgavyāpitayā) ratyādīn kāye cārayanti sañcārayanti muhur muhur abhivyañjayantīti vā sañcāriṇa iti* | Lakṣmī commentary in SD, page 69.

20 *Daśarūpaka* IV, 34; and verses quoted by Jagannātha in *Rasagaṅgādhara I, sthāyī bhāvalakṣaṇam*. Translation by Chari in Chari 1976: 289.

21 This classification follows *Dhvanyāloka* 3.24 and Locana commentary thereon. See Ingalls *et al.* 1990: 506.

22 The issue of what is primary among the *rasas* is essential to the relation of self and *rasas*. For instance, if being in repose in the self, with distancing all the manifest emotional states, is viewed as central, then *śānta* becomes primary, and if desire is considered to be central to the self, *sṛṅgāra* becomes central.

23 *bāhyameyavimukhatāpādakaḥ kaścanāntaro dharmaḥ sattvam* | (SD, page 72, lines 1–2).

24 The Lakṣmī commentary gives the example of *prapāṇakarasa* to describe the unitary nature of *rasa* experience (SD, page 72, lines 27–28).

25 *bodhyaniṣṭhā yathāsvaṃ te sukhaduḥkhādihetavaḥ* | *bodhṛniṣṭhās tu sarve 'pi sukhamātraikahetava* || *Bhagavadbhaktirasāyana* 3.5.

26 *samūhālambanātmaikā jāyate sāttvikī matiḥ* | *sānantarakṣaṇe 'vaśyaṃ vyanakti sukham uttamam* || *Bhagavadbhaktirasāyana* 3.12cd–13ab.

27 Viśvanātha explains esthetic wonder as: *camatkāraś cittavistārarūpo vismayāparaparyyāyaḥ* | SD, page 72, line 6.

28 *tena na praīyate notpadyate nābhivyajyate kāvyena rasaḥ* | Locana in DĀ 2.4.

29 *tebhyaś ca surate dantaghātādibhya iva sukham eva jāyate* | SD page 77, line 10–page 78, line 1.

30 *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.22.

31 For instance, *Śāktavijñāna* details various corporeal symptoms of the rise of Śakti. See Silburn 1988: 121–23.

32 For discussions on *raudra rasa*, see Gitomer 2003: 219–36.

33 For the Tathāgatamaṇḍala, see *Guhyasamājatantra*, Chapter 1.

34 Among the weapons of Tripurasundarī, the rope (*pāśa*) is equated with passion (*rāga*) and the goad with aversion (*dveṣa*). The two aspects of *rāga* and *dveṣa* are worshipped in two sides of the Bhagamālinī *maṇḍala*.

35 The repeated phrase, '*yā devī sarvabhūteṣu ... rūpeṇa saṃsthitā*' (DM 5.14–73), highlights the transformation of the divine in these cognitive and emotional aspects and makes the divine as immanent.

36 For various commentaries on *Saundaryalaharī*, see Kuppuswami 1991. For the studies on *Saundaryalaharī*, see Brown 1958; Subrahmanian 1977; Clooney 2005; and Timalsina 2014 (forthcoming).

37 These identifications are found in *Padamālāmantra*. See Gupta in Harper and Brown 2002: 231–49.

38 *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.44–45.

39 *niyatiśṛṅgārādayo rasā aṇimādisiddhayaḥ kāmakrodhalobhamohamadamātsar yapuṇyapāpamayyo brāhmyādy aṣṭaśaktayaḥ* || *Bhāvanopaniṣad,* stanza 11.

40 Dawa-samdup 1919: 7.

41 Lokesh Chandra in Dawa-samdup 1919: 22–29 (preface).

42 *nirupādhikīsaṃvid eva kāmeśvaraḥ* || *sadānandapūrṇaḥ svātmaiva paradevatā lalitā* || *Bhāvanopaniṣad*, stanzas 26–27.

43 *lauhityam etasya sarvasya vimarśaḥ* || *Bhāvanopaniṣad*, stanza 27.

44 *śabdāditanmātrāḥ pañcapuṣpabāṇāḥ* || *mana ikṣudhanuḥ* || *rāgaḥ pāśaḥ* || *dveṣo'ṅkuśaḥ* || *Bhāvanopaniṣad* 21–24.

45 Fashioned in the image of Tripurā, the image of the Buddhist Tantric deity Kurukullā suggests passion and amorous desire with her glowing red color. Her bewitching powers help subjugate enemies, and emotions are quelled for the yogin. Kurukullā is depicted as sitting on Kāma and Rati, the amorous couple, who repeatedly appear as devotees of Tripurā as well (Shaw 2006: 432–47).

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7 Conclusions

Tantras pay equal attention to visual forms as they do to their linguistic expression. Their private and public practices are suffused with images and they demonstrate an internal systematic organization of visual forms to express specific concepts and emotions. This work has therefore been dedicated to exploring the nuances of images in Tantric culture with some broad generalization applicable to understanding the larger visual culture. Moving beyond the works of Charles Sanders Pierce, Umberto Eco, Don Ihde, and other philosophers who have worked on visual hermeneutics, this work analyzes the cognitive and emotional domains of images in order to excavate meaning embedded within culture. The articulation and institutionalization of meaning stands as an integral part of cultural existence and revival. Therefore the chapters above are dedicated to establishing a dialogue between the Indian material culture and the emerging field of cognitive science. Semiotic expression, utilized herein as the basic building blocks of meaning in images, is vivid in every aspect of addressing Tantric images, and this tendency is epitomized in the emic readings of the limbs and seats of deities.[1] The chapters above demonstrate how cultural dialogue is possible through the exchange of forms and how cultures have expressed their concerns through images in the internal semiotic shift. Many other aspects of addressing visual culture, even within Tantras, have not been discussed in this text, and it remains a task for future research.

This work also comes in commemoration of the shift towards the study of image and imagination in contemporary scholarly discourse. The dominant framework for addressing religions, shaped primarily by Semitic cultures and an analytic philosophical tradition, has isolated itself from engaging images in any meaningful way. The resurgent study of forms in cognitive sciences and phenomenological research has given the much-needed space for this analysis, and again, this is for future scholarship to explore various cognitive and emotional domains of the culture of visualization.

Most importantly, contemplative practices with images at the core allow us to analyze the role imagination plays in various cognitive and emotional activities. There is an imprint of imagination in every mode of cognition. While this could be considered detrimental to various forms of realism, the prominence of imagination as a category in Indian philosophical traditions

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complements this study for understanding human cognitive behavior that involves images. Contrary to naïve or uninformed speculation, images in these cultures are the means for subjects to enhance their capacity of imagination, strengthen attention, and organize memory. This reshaping of different cognitive domains through the manipulation of images in contemplative practice is a subject of the utmost interest for furthering our knowledge in the arena of human consciousness where the phenomenological evidence is more decisive than a mere lab experiment.

Arguments in the previous chapters also point in the direction of an epistemology developed and grounded in culture itself. The analysis of metonymic and metaphoric systems, holographic cultural expression found in Tantric visualization, and the cultivation of emotions in visualization practices as epitomized in the culture of *rasa* all point in the same direction – that cultures shape basic cognitive and emotional responses, and contemplative practices reshape everyday experience by remapping cognitive processes. Culture, along these lines, is both shaped by, and instrumental in, shaping human experience. A much-needed focus for future studies, in accordance with the research in the above chapters, is a cultural epistemology with an equal focus on folk theories and visual culture. Rituals and images are crucial in the Indian cultural imagination, and the cultural self is engrained with the experiences cultivated in this process. The role of collective and personal memory, the organization of self-experience and finding oneself as a social subject, and the multiple responses to different emotions that are ingrained with specific cultural expectations, are all vivid in the above examination of Tantric images. The previous chapters have outlined the fundamental building blocks for studying the role of images in cultural experience, starting from the basic morphology of images, the use of metonymy to analyze complex emotions, to understanding the emotional domain of images. Findings in these chapters are consistent with the argument that our everyday experiences are shaped by culture and perceptual, emotional, and cognitive domains share cultural underpinnings.

This book differs from mainstream cultural and religious studies that primarily focus on socio-historical aspects. Besides reading cultures as organizing forces for socio-political transactions, a more fruitful discourse can emerge by reading cultures to understand the ways human experiences are shaped and maintained. Understanding what a Tantric does in isolation from society in his meditation room or cremation ground may be socially less productive than understanding the ways human cognition is constructed and maintained through contemplative practices, with religious and secular experiences sharing the broader cultural underpinnings. Tantric textual and visual culture primarily focus on bringing images to mind, and it is mind-boggling that this aspect has generated little attention in mainstream academe. I have endeavored only to demonstrate that an alternative reading to cultural artifacts has a broad and unrealized potential. For this to occur, cultural studies needs to pay equal if not more attention to phenomenological and cognitive approaches while liberating the discipline from its colonial legacy.

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Although written texts and folk rituals have gained some attention in contemporary studies, the issue of images remains in oblivion. What we see in the field, though, is that all Tantric practices without exception involve one or another form of visualization. Various terms like imagination (*kalpanā*), memory (*smaraṇa*), and meditation (*dhyāna*) come in the context of bringing to the mental space various geometric or deity images, and these practices are integral to Tantric rituals. Without properly addressing images, Tantric culture remains opaque. Contemporary studies that isolate these domains have, in effect, created a new culture that aligns with the reader's preconceptions rather than the reader gaining insight from the cultures being examined.

I have adopted an integrated approach to studying cultures by incorporating both the etic and emic perspectives. Even the most systematic philosophies for analyzing cultural experiences born out of indigenous cultures are viewed by the social scientists today as subordinate to their own framework that is foreign to the presuppositions of the cultures being examined. This has added more confusion than understanding. I have addressed only select aspects of visualization and the culture of images, and the first among these approaches is reading Tantric images as part of mnemonic practice. Besides their role in cultivating mystical experience and altering the states of consciousness, Tantric images meet the criteria for mnemonic devices, since these are used to bring to mind a wider system of beliefs or broader philosophical categories. The opacity of images is vivid throughout the entire Indian culture, whether the image is of Gaṇeśa with an elephant head and a mouse for a ride, or of Kālī with her graphic presence. As mnemonic devices, these images are meaningful, bring to the subject's mind broader cultural and philosophical categories, and thus can be the subject of scholarly discourse.

Contemporary research on the relationship between image and speech can be matched with the contemplative practices that have much to offer in understanding the cognitive activities of attention, memory, or recognition. Tantric practitioners do not merely focus on mental images, they also evoke a wide range of meaning while manipulating and integrating forms and bringing the icons to life. Cognitively, it is of the utmost interest to know when a piece of imagination stops being imagination, projected outside by the subject with an awareness of the object as his fancy, and starts being reality for that subject, giving him the conviction that the images in his mind are real. This study has only begun to address these questions.

This research on Tantric visual culture has established that it consistently relies on metonymic and metaphoric structures in constructing and deciphering the imagery. From a basic image to the most complex ones with multiple heads and hands and with a series of seats, images are suggesting *some*thing and the language in these contexts is that of metonymy and metaphor. Thanks to contemporary advances in linguistics, semiotics, cognitive science, and phenomenology, we now know that metaphor and metonymy are not merely poetic devices but are the basic tools we use in everyday cognitive activities. I have attempted only to demonstrate in the chapters on metonymy

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and metaphor that these processes have enriched cultural experience, Tantric or otherwise. The above analysis demonstrates that the cultivation of esthetic or mystical experience while encountering images has a cultural underpinning, and the meaning embedded within forms can be deciphered by systematically analyzing metonymic and metaphoric devices. For both metaphor and metonymy, we need to activate multiple domains for making a cognitive link. What this implies is that some cognitive activities are presumed prior to metaphoric and metonymic thinking. More studies are required to analyze the ways unique experiences are made and transmitted throughout cultures, shaping personal and collective identities, and enabling the individual and society to function. What is clear is that imagination and imaging in particular play a pivotal role in these cultural transactions.

Tantric embodied practices and visualizations constitute an intricate relationship between our body schema and body image. How the society cultivates an embodied subject or the body-self depends on the process whereby the individual places his body-parts in an imagined space and updates this schema during corporeal movement. It is evident that body schema is dynamic, and cultural parameters and contemplative practices can have a direct role in shaping the understanding of our embodiment. The image body, or the bodies viewed as divine or human in Tantric practices, have a clear and unmistakable influence in the body schema, and this relation can be further studied by examining Tantric visual culture with a focus on embodied visualization practices and their transformative role in subject's affirmation of embodied experiences.

Tantric images cannot be localized in a single historical time or attributed to a single artist. Even with the embedded multiplicity of worldviews, these images have continued to mean something for the viewers nonetheless. Each of the deity images is an archive in itself, and one can explore Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of sedimentation, with layers of new meanings embedded with the earlier ones, having different meanings for different times and viewers. I have attempted only to outline some salient features when exploring Tantric images. The implications, however, are universal, as the same process is visible in any aspect of the material culture. Thousands of deities with millions of forms narrate a single theme of shaping and sustaining cultural experience. With further studies, I hope that a universal language of imagery can be established, or that the basic patterns in our metonymic thinking can be deciphered.

Embodied experiences are at the core of metonymic and metaphoric thinking. Rather than metaphors being a conscious cognitive process of integrating different inputs from different sources, it makes sense that this integration occurs pre-cognitively. The animation of images and integration of multiple domains in visualizing meaning aid our understanding of this process of constructing metonyms and metaphors. It is explicit in the examples above that basic concepts are spatialized so that something abstract can be mapped in the mental space by borrowing aspects from the external space. Classical

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Indian discourse on *lakṣaṇā* or indication is a good place to start categorizing such structures beneath our concepts. Although a significant amount of work has been done in cognitive linguistics, parallel Indian theories have not been equally explored. They are significant, not only to understand the culture being studied but also because their precise analysis of particular cognitive linguistic or emotional aspects have the potential to advance our current understanding of consciousness and emotion. My attempt in the above chapters is only cursory and suggests the need for further exploration in Indian literary theories in light of contemporary cognitive science.

Tantric visualization relies primarily on orientational and conceptual metaphors. Images are structured in relation to each other, and in the process of embedding new meanings within the imagery, many of the concepts are borrowed from existing Vedic and other Indian cultures. These metaphors and metonyms map reality through embodied experience, and in this way the body becomes a yardstick for measuring reality. Entities are cognized in relation to distinctive body-parts, and different human activities are mapped in relation to the referent limbs. This is where the imaginary body becomes important, as it is not just the real body that gives structure to metaphoric thinking, but also the imagined body, the body that we aspire to have, or the body glorified by the culture being examined. For example, the binary metaphors of 'illumination' (*prakāśa*) and 'reflective awareness' (*vimarśa*) describe the ways the target in the metaphor borrows from multiple sources. Philosophies, such as Trika, Spanda, or Pratyabhijñā, in addition to the Siddhānta and various other Śaivite traditions, are thus inseparably intertwined with cultural expression, and the contemporary studies of Tantric culture that isolate Tantric philosophies from their practice thus rely on faulty assumptions.

What underlies these metonymic and metaphoric structures is conceptual integration or blending, as Fauconnier has termed. Borrowing different inputs from our experience and creating a structure that is entirely new and additional to the inputs is common to the evolution of human consciousness. This process is vivid in Tantric visualization where new images are created by borrowing aspects from other images. Deities with five heads and ten arms, for instance, depict the aspects of five different divinities simultaneously. Some images integrate different modes of time by depicting different events at the same time. Mapping different spaces is quite common: a *maṇḍala* stands for the cosmos with different heavenly bodies corresponding to different divinities being mapped in a single image. The most exalted among Tantric philosophies, the system of Pratyabhijñā, weaves everyday experiences with the broader agenda of self-realization, and instances of consciousness are viewed in this paradigm as similar to the rays of the sun. The self, the central deity, or the center in a *maṇḍala*, all stand for this transcendent reality that makes the immanent possible. Conceptual integration is also essential in developing philosophy itself, as the Pratyabhijñā philosophy demonstrates, with the founding philosophers' (such as Somānanda's) reliance on preexisting Siddhānta texts, or elementary concepts borrowed from earlier literature. The

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order in which Tantric visual culture has evolved is matched with the process of systematizing Tantric philosophies. The medieval development of Śākta traditions, with Tripurā being the ultimate Śākta divinity, explains the same phenomenon – the absorption of existing perspectives and images within a single narrative, where the new image or perspective transcends the existing forms and concepts while weaving the preexisting perspectives within a single rubric. Conceptual blend has much to offer in understanding of the development of both Tantric images and philosophies. This process of synthesis is also at the center of *rasa,* and exploring the ways *rasa* theory has been analyzed is relevant for furthering our knowledge of cultivating complex emotions. Since *rasa* is a culmination of the Indian philosophy of theatrics, further research in this direction is meaningful for developing a hermeneutics of visual culture.

While on one hand the synthetic process of conceptual integration is pivotal to developing the culture of visualization, an understanding of the holographic nature of consciousness is equally central to weaving different practices and beliefs into a system. Congruent with holographic epistemology, when body-parts are analyzed in the Hindu myths, these limbs are treated as complete bodies. This brings the conceptual framework back to the embodied state, as most of the part-whole analysis rests on the individual's understanding of his body. A new form of epistemology is thus needed to address this cultural and contemplative experience that relies on perceiving reality as integral, with every single aspect of existence interpenetrating and interdependent, and mind and body as two extensions of the same being.

If embodiment is central to our conceptualization of the world and the visualization practices in Tantras reinforce this philosophy, then it is essential to address the role emotions play in these practices. This is where four different approaches collectively contribute to our knowledge. The first is, the exploration of indigenous practices, rituals in particular, which display an euphoric expression of emotions, be it heroism or horror. Second, the classical Indian theory of *rasa* grounds transcendental experiences in the mundane terms of the play of emotions. Three, contemporary cognitive and psychological theories of emotion facilitate the process of addressing the cultivation of specific emotions in the transforming modes of rituals. Finally, Indian philosophical systems offer essential feedback that can synthesize these diverse perspectives which do not follow the oppositional binary of the body and mind embedded within Western philosophy and culture. Tantric Kaula philosophy equates *kula* with the body, initiating the discourse on philosophical categories by relying on the body. The Trika system, the basis of the philosophy of Abhinava, gives the triadic imagery of the goddess Parā, Parāparā, and Aparā, as the basis of the central emotional states. The embodied self is also the emotional self and the consciousness addressed by engaging the body also presupposes emotions. Recognition of the self, along these lines, is not a dissociation of the embodied and emotional domains of the self. On the contrary, the self that is recognized is very much embodied, emotional, and

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complete. Described in terms of the recognition of completeness (*pūrṇatā-pratyabhijñā*), this self-realization acknowledges the body and emotion as essential to being conscious. Engaging visualization practices in the mainstream discourse has the potential not only to remap our understanding of Indian culture, but also to shed light on varied nuances of embodiment and consciousness, concept formation, imagination, and memory in particular. Someone blind from birth may well be an art critic, but I do not think it possible to read Tantric culture separate from the images and Tantric philosophies. The approaches I have engaged in the above pages rely on these assumptions.

Note

1 For study of body and parts in Tantric images, see Timalsina 2014 (*Language of Images*, Peter Lang, in Press).

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TANTRIC VISUAL CULTURE

Indian culture relies greatly on visual expression, and this book uses both classical Indian and contemporary Western philosophies and current studies on cognitive sciences, and applies them to contextualize Tantric visual culture.

The work selects aspects of Tantric language and the practice of visualization, with the central premise to engage cognitive theories while studying images. It utilizes the contemporary theories of metaphor and cognitive blend, the theory of metonymy, and a holographic theory of epistemology with a focus on concept formation and its application to the study of myths and images. In addition, it applies the classical aesthetic theory of rasa to unravel the meaning of opaque images. This philosophical and cognitive analysis allows materials from Indian culture to be understood in a new light, while engaging contemporary theories of cognitive science and semantics. The book demonstrates how the domains of meaning and philosophy can be addressed within any culture without reducing their intrinsic cultural significance.

By addressing these key aspects of Tantric traditions through this approach, this book initiates a much-needed dialogue between Indian and Western theories, while encouraging introspection within the Indic traditions themselves. It will be of interest to those studying and researching Religion, Philosophy and South Asian Culture.

Sthaneshwar Timalsina is Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at San Diego State University, USA.

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